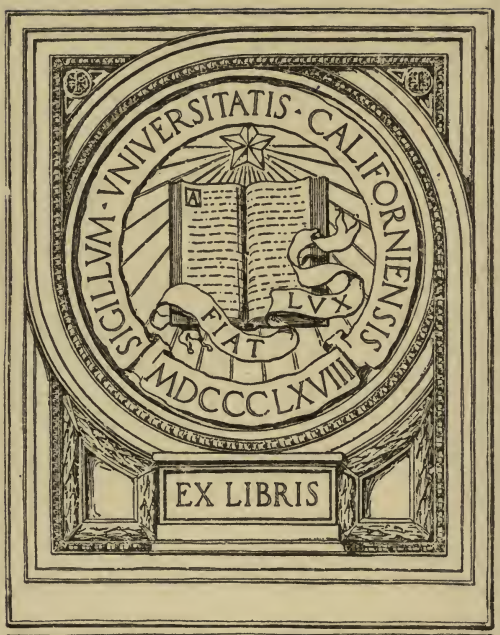
MASTER FLACHSMANN

By OTTO ERNST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MASTER FLACHSMANN

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MASTER FLACHSMANN

(FLACHSMANN ALS ERZIEHER)

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

OTTO ERNST

TRANSLATED BY

H. M. BEATTY, M.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "EDUCATION IN A PRUSSIAN TOWN," ETC.

"But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep"

NEW YORK:

DUFFIELD & COMPANY

36–38 WEST 37th STREET

MAIN

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CALIFORNIA

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PT2638
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

It cannot be said with truth that we are a play-reading people. In the bookshops of Paris the plays of Augier, in half-a-dozen volumes, take their place with the "sets" of popular authors. In London there is nothing parallel; although of late years readers have been attracted by the witty paradoxes of Gilbert, Wilde, and Shaw, and, in a transient way, by the polished verse of Mr. Stephen Phillips. But these are scarcely cases in point; nor, again, is the endless procession of editions of Shakespeare—which are read much more for their poetry and thought than for their stagecraft and dramatic skill. Indeed, it might with some reason be contended that the only plays in English which are read with the dramatic eye are Sheridan's: that is, read with the eye which a dramatic critic would apply to a new play. Why this should be so, whether it is due to the dramatic inferiority of English plays, or to the disinclination of English readers to regard the drama as a fitting object of serious study, this is not the place to inquire.

But if such be the case with regard to our native drama, what is the prospect before a translation of

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a foreign play? Who will read a translation of a German play of which the scene is laid in a schoolhouse, of which the characters are schoolmasters and schoolmistresses? School stories are usually either muscular, or lachrymose, or unctuous. *Flachsmann* is none of these. It is indeed at times sentimental and nebulous; but its humanity is broad and robust enough to interest those to whom German sentimentality and German nebulosity are ridiculous or nauseous. Flachsmann himself is well worth knowing; he is a ruffian of the unimaginative, Philistine, mechanical type, with the precision of a steam-engine and the heart of a steam-roller. In some respects he reminds one of Tartuffe; but he is not exactly a hypocrite. He has his solid beliefs; he believes in the steam-roller. So does Weidenbaum, the fragile shadow of the massive bulk of Flachsmann; while Diercks hardly believes in anything, hardly even in his own malicious egotism. Flemming is the "ideal" schoolmaster. His views are to our ears a trifle "tall," and sometimes slightly incoherent; still he is a human being, and one feels that to the German eye he must be superb. Gisa, too, is a very German *ingénue*, but she has a pretty wit at times, and she thinks that "nothing breaks up holidays more horribly than work." Negendank, the old soldier, is a very real man; and Prell is a rich compound, in equal proportions, of the official, the pedant, and the enthusiast—two creations which are almost worthy to stand beside Dugald Dalgetty and Tartarin of Tarascon.

So much for the characters—and this is a play of character rather than of incident. It must also be confessed that it is a play with a moral. The title, *Flachsmann als Erzieher* ("Flachsmann as teacher"), was apparently suggested by a book called *Rembrandt als Erzieher*—a strange medley of philosophy, æsthetics, education, and politics, which, published anonymously, has run into fifty editions; and the play is clearly a protest against the subordination of spirit to flesh, of the childish soul to official routine and machinery.

In Germany the play has been a success. Two years ago it was in its twenty-second thousand; and Prell has furnished a favourite *rôle* to a brilliant actor, Hermann Vallentin, who is now engaged at the Neues Schauspielhaus in Berlin. Whether it would be a success on the English stage is another question. But it may be claimed that the dialogue is good, the plot well constructed, the "curtains" effective, and the characters sufficiently defined.

The interest of the play as an educational "document"—as a picture of school life in Germany, painted by the author from the first-hand knowledge of personal experience—is undoubted.

OTTO ERNST

Otto Ernst Schmidt (who writes under the *nom de guerre* of Otto Ernst) was born in Ottensen in 1862, and, after receiving his education in his native place, entered a Training College for Teachers in Hamburg. His first book (a volume of poems) was published in 1881, and his second in 1895; while in the succeeding dozen years he has published nearly twenty more. *Flachsmann als Erzieher* dates from 1902, and his most successful story, *Asmus Sempers Jugendland*, from 1905.

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THE PLOT OF THE PLAY

THIRTY years before the opening of the play a young man called George Henry Flachsmann qualified by examination for a teachership in an elementary school, but died soon after of consumption. His elder brother, John Henry Flachsmann, who had failed at his examination, took possession of his papers, assumed his name, and was appointed to a school in a provincial town. Here he made himself comfortable. An official from headquarters rarely came; the local amateur, who, after the German fashion, acted as inspector, was an easy-going gentleman who was too glad to leave everything in Flachsmann's hands; and the only person who knew his history, an assistant teacher called Diercks, was willing to hold his tongue in the expectation of Flachmann's recommendation for promotion.

Thus all might have been well but for the arrival of an assistant called Flemming. Between Flachsman and Flemming the antagonism was almost instinctive—Flemming, a Pestalozzian revolutionary, Flachsmann, the man of routine and red tape. A

stormy interview, precipitating a report to the central authority, closes the first act.

Naturally, Flachsmann's partisans direct their criticisms against Flemming, who, owing to a misunderstanding, loses the good feeling of even the few progressive members of the staff, and is left at length with none to console him except little Gisa Holm. Chief Inspector Prell arrives, charged with an inquiry into Flachsmann's complaints against Flemming, and is by no means favourably impressed by the bold and somewhat disrespectful demeanour of the accused.

In the third act Prell reigns supreme. A short investigation convinces him of the incompetence and fraud of Diercks, whom he dismisses on the spot. Flachsmann's own incompetence in teaching suggests doubts, which are intensified by his halting and inconsistent explanations, and are fully justified by the timely arrival of a letter from Diercks, who, dismissed himself, determines to involve Flachsmann in his ruin. The tale of fraudulent certificates is here set forth, Flachsmann is shot out, his place is given to Flemming, and the play ends, while Flemming and Gisa dance a round to the music of the children's singing lesson.

CHARACTERS

GEORGE HENRY FLACHSMANN, Head Master of an Elementary Boys' School.

JACK FLEMMING
BERNARD VOGELSANG
CARSTEN DIERCKS
EMILIUS WEIDENBAUM
NICHOLAS RIEMANN
FRANK RÖMER
} Masters.

BETTY STURHAHN
GISA HOLM
} Mistresses of the Junior Classes.

NEGENDANK, Flachsmann's School Porter.

KLUTH, School Porter of the adjoining Girls' School.

School Inspector BRÖSECKE.

Professor Dr. PRELL, Official School Commissioner.

Mrs. DÖRMANN.

MAX, her son, six years old.

BROCKMANN.

Mrs. BIESENDAHL.

ALFRED, her son, fourteen years old
ROBERT PFEIFFER, fourteen years old
} Pupils of Flemming.

CHARLEY JENSEN, Pupil of Vogelsang.

Scene of the Action: A smaller provincial town.
Time: The present.

Between the acts a fortnight elapses in each case.

Master Flachsmann

FIRST ACT

(*Right and left of the spectator.*)

The office of the Head Master FLACHSMANN. *The whole get-up of the room is of the usual dreary character. In the foreground, somewhat to the right, is a writing-table of lacquered deal, without a top. On the table all is in punctilious order. Behind the table, a revolving chair to match. In an exact right angle with it, and on the right hand, an ordinary chair for lesser folk; on the left, an armchair for distinguished visitors. On the walls are presses with books, maps, charts for Observation lessons, Science apparatus, &c., some of which are visible through glass doors. In the left background, on the table, an enormous globe, covered with a sort of cosy; on the walls, time-tables and other documents: among others, a huge closely-printed placard with the superscription, "School Regulations." Doors in the*

middle (folding doors) and to the left. Right and left of the middle door a pair of the very cheapest pictures of William the First and the Empress Augusta. Near the middle door to the left, a board for the keys of the class-rooms, on which some keys are still hanging. Through the open middle door the corridor can be seen, where several visitors are waiting and walking up and down. On the other side of the corridor is seen a door on which "Class III." is distinctly marked in Roman letters; and whenever the door is opened the teacher's desk, a blackboard, and so on are seen. In the wall to the right is a window. On the door to the left "Apparatus Room" is marked with equally distinct Roman characters. The whole schoolhouse is an antiquated structure, not originally intended for school purposes.

SCENE I

NEGENDANK, *the school porter, an old soldier, well into the fifties, beard with shaven chin. Speech good-humoured and bluff. Extreme deliberation in his movements. He is giving the last tidying touch to* FLACHSMANN'S *writing-table.* MRS. DÖRMANN, *poorly but neatly dressed, a very pretty woman of thirty-two years, sits waiting on the corridor; her little boy* MAX (*a pretty little fellow of six years old*) *stands at her side.*

MRS. DÖR. Mr. Negendank! Mr. Negendank!

NEGEN. Hm?

MRS. DÖR. Will the Head Master not come soon?

NEGEN. You must be patient. He will come directly.

MRS. DÖR. Yes, but I have no time to stay longer. I have four other little ones at home, that I have locked in.

NEGEN. Indeed! We have four hundred children, and every one of them must be looked after. We must hold our inspection in the morning, to see that everything is in order.

MRS. DÖR. Ah, your children look after themselves.

NEGEN. Dear Mrs. Dörmann, you form a very frivolous conception of our vocation. Look here—— (*Voices heard within.*) One moment! (*Signs to* MRS. DÖRMANN *to withdraw.*)

SCENE II

WEIDENBAUM, *a haggard man, with very crooked back, light grey hair and close-clipped beard of the same colour; wrinkled and pinched features; slow, snuffling speech. Gold spectacles.* RIEMANN, *type of the rustic schoolmaster; broad, red face, short, flaxen hair, short moustache of similar hue. He wears a jacket, a slightly cut-away vest, and trousers so short that they show the grey stockings and the rims of the low-laced shoes. Wears no cuffs. Speech slovenly, with a touch of the brogue.* NEGENDANK.

RIEMANN. So he provokes me to twelve and there I'm stuck. I turn up: Seven of Clubs! But have nothing else except eight and nine of Clubs, so play without thinking.

WEIDEN. Yes . . . Negendank, are all the windows in my class-room close shut? You know I cannot bear a draught.

NEGEN. Certainly, Mr. Weidenbaum; all is in proper order. (*Presently steps out to the corridor.*)

RIEMANN. Now just listen; this is the way. I cast the King of Spades an' Ten of Spades, an' the

lead plays a small Heart. I finesse the king an' the hind hand throws the Queen of Hearts slick. Now to be sure I follow up with the Ace of Hearts, an' they play Ten and Eight.

WEIDEN. Yes, my dear Riemann, I fear duty calls . . .

RIEMANN. No, but listen to the rest. I then play Ace of Spades . . .

SCENE III

The same. BETTY STURHAHN. *Later* VOGELSANG. *Still later* MRS. DÖRMANN *and* MAX.

BETTY (*square-built person with angular head and bull-dog face. She steps as if she wore men's boots; and in her bearing and voice gives the impression of a female non-com.; plain, tasteless dress*). Good morning. (*Takes a key from the board.*)

(RIEMANN *and* WEIDENBAUM *give a careless return to the greeting.*)

BETTY (*stepping right up to* RIEMANN). Yesterday you countermanded an order which I had given to my class. If you try that again, I will play you a tune that will make your eyes water—do you hear?

RIEMANN. But how did I . . . I don't know what . . . I have only . . .

BETTY. Remember that.

RIEMANN (*to himself, when she is out of earshot*). Old dragon!

BETTY (*goes out with her sturdy step and runs into the stomach of* VOGELSANG, *who is coming in*). Why can't you look before you?

VOGEL. (*a jovial fifty-year-old, with a thick head of grayish hair; strong, dark moustache and imperial, and powerful voice. Smart appearance. Catches* BETTY *by the elbows and pushes her a little back into the room. Lovingly*). The sight of you dazzled me, my dear lady.

BETTY. You are a Jack Pudding.

VOGEL. My God, I know that; but it needn't be thrown in one's teeth every moment.

BETTY. Let me go!

VOGEL. (*with a sigh*). If it must be so. (*She tears herself off and goes out in a rage.*) Good morning, gentlemen. (*Handshakes and greetings.*) Well, gentlemen, what say you to the last edict of our friend Flachsmann?

RIEMANN. Och! he's just cracked.

WEIDEN. On principle, I never speak of the orders of my superiors; no good comes of it. I do my duty and do not trouble myself about anything else.

VOGEL. That is the safest way, Weidenbaum. (*Both of them go to the back to get their keys.*)

RIEMANN (*puts himself at* WEIDENBAUM'S *right*). Well, I must tell you now how it was. I play Ace of Hearts, down come Eight and Ten, and then Ace of Spades. (VOGELSANG *and* WEIDENBAUM *go out chatting, without listening to him and he continues his tale to* NEGENDANK, *who has come in again.*) Queen and Seven are played. Well, naturally, I follow with Nine of Spades and then . . .

NEGEN. Mr. Riemann, I don't understand anything about Skat.

RIEMANN (*with boundless astonishment*). You understand nothing about Skat? What then do you play?

NEGEN. Solo.

RIEMANN (*with a laugh of lofty superiority*). Ha-ha, ha-ha! Solo? (*Takes his key.*) The man plays Solo! Well, listen! *You* are—Solo! (*Goes out.*)

MRS. DÖR. (*appears again at the door*). Mr. Negendank——

NEGEN. Yes, yes, he must come now directly. What exactly is it you want, Mrs. Dörmann?

MRS. DÖR. The principal thing was, I wished to ask whether the school fee could not be forgiven me. I——

NEGEN. Dear Mrs. Dörmann, that will not be easy. We have in the last year expended something like half a million on school purposes. And for all that (*with a wave towards the room*) never a new schoolhouse has come our way yet. We have been making too much of a splash with our outlay, and —well, I will put in a word for you.

MRS. DÖR. Ah, that is nice of you.

NEGEN. Yes, and then—— (*Noise from the left.*) Hello! That is Mr. Flemming again, take my word. Sure enough!

SCENE IV

As before. ALFRED BIESENDAHL *and* ROBERT PFEIFFER, *two schoolboys, rush in. Behind them* FLEMMING, *plainly but very well and carefully dressed; black coat and waistcoat, light trousers; fair moustache; self-possessed, well-bred bearing. Later* DIERCKS.

FLEMMING. You fellows must not kick up such a row.

THE BOYS (*pressing round him and besieging him*). Mr. Flemming, may I carry the globe?—please, Mr. Flemming, let me—please, *me*, Mr. Flemming.

FLEMMING (*with comical gruffness*). Be quiet! (*Takes the globe.*) What is the name of the man who carries the globe.

ALFRED. Ajax!

FLEMMING. Ho! (*Jams down the cosy on his head.*)

ROBERT. Mr. Flemming, I know, I know.

FLEMMING. Well, out with it.

ROBERT (*stuttering with excitement*). A-A-A-Atlas.

FLEMMING. There, Atlas, take the globe; but don't knock it about, or I'll make mincemeat of you.

(ALFRED *laughs overloud.*) Do not bellow like that, man. (*Goes to a press to the left.*) And here (*takes out a rolled-up chart and gives it to the first boy*) . . . there!

ALFRED. What is that, Mr. Flemming?

FLEMMING (*confidentially*). That is the picture of Joe Miller's grandmother! (*Both boys laugh.*) Little chaps laugh nicely, you know! The horse neighs. Man laughs. When we play on the grass: then we neigh. Do you see?

THE BOYS. Yes, Mr. Flemming?

FLEMMING. Bless you! Right turn. March! (*The boys exeunt.*) They are happy, Mrs. Dörmann; what do you think? They laugh at their luck, whether it is good or ill.

MRS. DÖR. Yes, Mr. Flemming. Say good morning, Max.

MAX (*comes down on* FLEMMING'S *hand with a mighty smack*). Morrow!

FLEMMING (*bends down to the lad*). Is that the youngest?

MRS. DÖR. Ah, Mr. Flemming, what a notion! There are three others after him.

FLEMMING. I say, youngster, shall we have a merry-go-round?

MAX. Oh yes! Let us.

FLEMMING (*squats down, sets the boy on his right knee and turns very rapidly in a circle*). Do you like that?

MAX. Oh, yes! Some more!

FLEMMING. When you come back. Now I must

go to the other children. They all want merry-go-rounds.

MRS. DÖR (*in delight and excitement*). Mr. Flemming, I was always wishing to have a word with you.

FLEMMING. Is that so? Certainly.

MRS. DÖR. Yes, I wished some time to thank you for my Peter. Since the little fellow has been with you he is not the same boy. The youngster was not to be lugged into the school. (*Confidentially but emphatically.*) Especially Mr. Diercks—the little fellow ab-so-lutely could not abide him. Mercy me, what a worry it was! All week mitching, and all week mitching!

NEGEN. Aye, the deuce he was! The rogue made it warm for us. It is nearly a year ago that he was standing here beside Mr. Flachsmann and was in for a caning. And just as Mr. Flachsmann turns his back (*at the recollection of the occurrence, shaking with hearty laughter*) the little fellow springs, if you please, out of the window. Just out of the window, as true as I am standing here. As a member of the staff the thing has naturally caused me great distress; but it was infernally good sport.

(DIERCKS, *big man, with full, brutal, beardless face, which reveals an expression of bucolic craft. Speaks always in a swaggering tone. Well dressed* (*shooting jacket*), *with sporting air. Comes from the left out of the apparatus room and busies himself at a press. He is evidently*

listening and following what is said with grimaces of mocking jealousy.)

MRS. DÖR. Yes—and now? I cannot always be without the lad with so many little children. I have no husband now and must be going to strange houses to sew; and you know well, Mr. Flemming, that, with six young ones, a woman is not as strong as she was before, and so the big boy must help now and then. That is the way with so many children; and when they are once there we don't want any of them away, you know right well. But I have only to say, "Peter, you must go to school to-day an hour later"—you have the little fellow crying as hard as he can.

FLEMMING. He is a pretty forward child; he is beginning already to have a good deal of sense.

MRS. DÖR (*decisively*). No. He is so fond of your lessons. And you have trusted him from the first; and that way you can get anything out of him. That was the way with his father before him.

FLEMMING (*pulling out his watch*). Mrs. Dörmann, I must now——

MRS. DÖR. But I wanted only to say to you, Mr. Flemming—listen now: I have no money, but if you have anything at all to sew and darn and mend —bachelors have always something coming off.

FLEMMING (*sportfully surveying himself*). Is that so?

MRS. DÖR. Then won't you give it always to me? It won't cost you a penny . . .

FLEMMING (*with rising laughter*). Dear Mrs. Dörmann, we work here altogether gratis—well, all but gratis. And when you tell me anything, like that story of your Peter, then I am over-paid. That is the thing to make a schoolmaster proud and rich.

MRS. DÖR (*looking thoughtfully at him*). Yes, that must be so indeed—for if it weren't? I cannot understand where you get the patience. I could never be a teacher . . .

FLEMMING. There you are, Mrs. Dörmann, I could be nothing else. If I could not be a teacher—it would be all up with me. But now I must be off. (*Going.*)

DIERCKS. Say, Flemming.

FLEMMING. Yes?

DIERCKS (*taking him a little aside.* MRS. DÖRMANN *retires with* NEGENDANK *to the corridor*). Have you heard the very latest performance of our respected Chief?

FLEMMING. Hm?

DIERCKS. From this out every answer which a pupil gives must be assigned a value on the spot, thus: How much are 3 + 4? 3 + 4 = 7. Report! How many legs has the dog? The dog has four legs. Report! And these values must then be compiled in weekly and monthly returns.

FLEMMING. He is a fox.

DIERCKS. A fox?

FLEMMING. Yes. He makes his living with a thousand returns.

DIERCKS. Ha-ha, very good. Moreover, in future

all books must be covered with ash-coloured paper, and no other colour is to be allowed.

FLEMMING. Well, well! "Highest bliss to man is given in his"*—uniformity. In this ingeniously conducted school you can commit any imbecility. Of one thing only you must be very careful—that all are imbecile together.

DIERCKS. Yes, but what I meant was, we cannot put up with a thing like that. You ought to put in a word on the subject. You're the proper person.

FLEMMING. I? No, my dear fellow, I was once foolish like that. You push me forward, and behind my back down you come; and then I'm the—the—improper person. I do not mind some vexatious tricks and rebuffs; but after all I should not like to have to give up my profession and take to selling lottery tickets. If you will take up something in common I will certainly not stand out; as for the rest, I bear on my own back the yoke (*with a gesture to the outside*) of this . . . fellow so long as I can . . . not longer.

* A reminiscence of a Goethean apophthegm.

SCENE V

As before. GISA HOLM, *pretty, slender thing of scarcely middle height, with large, very lively eyes, brown hair daintily curling on the brow and the temples, and very brisk movements. In dress and bearing she offers a complete contrast to the type of woman school-pedant; her dress is fashionable and very elegant, but by no means showy or over-stylish. Coquettish sunshade; in her bosom she wears a very beautiful rose.*

GISA. Good morning, gentlemen. (*She takes a key from the board.*)

DIERCKS (*affecting to jest, but really malicious*). Miss Holm! It is quite five minutes to eight.

GISA (*gaily snubbing him*). Then it is high time for you to be in your class.

FLEMMING. And again so beautifully decked with roses. Wherefore this exuberance?

GISA. To vex our beloved Chief. I know he cannot bear me to wear flowers. (FLACHSMANN'S *voice is heard.*) Hush, gentleman, the hooded crow!

SCENE VI

As before. FLACHSMANN.

FLACHS. (*behind the scene*). There is again a cap hanging on the lower hook! I have ordered the caps to be hung on the upper hooks. (*Enters. A spare man in the fifties, thin beard which still shows some dark spots, gold spectacles. His tone varies between hypocritical geniality and cool, rigid, official insolence. His head has a marked forward droop, and his glances seem to be always peering round every corner. When he looks any one in the face—which is not often and, in spite of all his insolence, with a certain timidity—he does so with a sort of upward slinking side-look. He wears a neat but threadbare grey frock-coat. After giving greeting*). Mr. Flemming, your class was not under supervision.

FLEMMING. I know it, Mr. Flachsmann. Was it noisy?

FLACHS. (*evasively, with malicious tone*). It was not under supervision.

FLEMMING. It was not noisy, then. I am glad of that. (*Outside.*) Goodbye, Mrs. Dörmann; goodbye, Maxi. (*Goes off.*)

(DIERCKS *has followed the last incident with appropriate looks, and interchanges with* FLACHSMANN *a meaning look and walks off in a leisurely way to the Third Class on the other side of the corridor.* GISA *is also about to go.*)

FLACHS. Ah—Miss Holm!

GISA. Mr. Flachsmann?

FLACHS. Yesterday in the school and during the school hours you sang aloud, and moreover danced the whole length of the corridor. You are very fond of dancing?

GISA. Passionately! Do you know Godfrey Keller?* The——

FLACHS. (*cutting her short*). No. I do not care with whom you dance. But I should like to repeat to you a couple of verses about dancing——

GISA. Ah! Goethe's (*giving him a languishing look*)

> "Leave them to whirl on and let us go straying;
> Straying of love is a dance all divine."

FLACHS. Goethe I never read, Miss Holm. The verses to which I refer run thus:—

> "Dance, hunt, game, stage, and all that sort of thing
> The world would hold to be quite free from sin.
> But if you will take heed to good advice:
> There are ice holes upon that kind of ice."

* A Swiss poet of the last century.

GISA (*with repressed mischief and assumed seriousness*). Hm! Hm! From Henry Heine, are they not?

FLACHS. Miss Holm! I do not jest. When you dance in your private capacity I cannot prevent you . . .

GISA (*drily*). No.

FLACHS. You have, however, danced in the school.

GISA. Yes. I felt so tremendously jolly just then.

FLACHS. That will not do.

GISA. No?

FLACHS. No. It is quite unbecoming. A schoolmistress should . . . I wished for some time to tell you . . . (*meaningly*) in her clothing . . . in the dressing of her hair . . . and in her whole demeanour continually offer to the children an example of quiet seriousness and staid dignity.

GISA (*with carefully assumed simplicity*). Am I not doing so, then?

FLACHS. Alas, no! You are now once for all a mistress . . .

GISA. Alas, yes.

FLACHS. . . . and must presumably remain so, unless you get married . . .

GISA. Ah! I should like so much to be. But I cannot propose to anybody.

FLACHS. (*guardedly*). One would almost think that would be in accordance with your notions.

GISA. Do you think so? Well, perhaps I do too.

FLACHS. I would also wear no flowers in the school, Miss Holm.

GISA. And still they must be so attractive to you!

FLACHS (*confused*). That is not the question now. Flowers are not for the school.

GISA (*emphatically*). There I differ entirely.

FLACHS. (*very gruffly*). Miss Holm! It is not your opinion but mine that decides here.

(GISA *makes a deep bow with a grave countenance and goes. Behind his back she noiselessly makes a couple of turns round, while she comically poises on her hips and makes faces at* FLACHSMANN. *Then she walks gravely out.*)

SCENE VII

FLACHSMANN, *then* NEGENDANK.

FLACHSMANN *has taken his seat at the writing-table and takes up a pen deliberately. He rings.*

NEGEN. (*enters, as ever, with soldierly bearing and imperturbable calm*). Mr. Head Master?

FLACHS. I have ordered that the black ink is to stand on the right and the red ink on the left.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. But the red ink is on the right and the black on the left.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. If I do not take care I shall be writing an official document with red ink.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master. (*Exchanges the ink bottles.*)

(*The school bell is heard sounding.*)

FLACHS. (*looks at his watch; excitedly*). It is ringing nearly two minutes late. Who has the ringing to-day?

NEGEN. Mr. Diercks, Head Master.

FLACHS. (*immediately breaking off*). Ah! Send in the people.

SCENE VIII

As before. MRS. DÖRMANN *and* MAX. MRS. DÖRMANN *comes in with her little boy.*

FLACHS. (*looking up, in a casual tone*). Mrs. Dörmann? What can I do for you?

MRS. DÖR. I wished to enter my Maxi.

FLACHS. Sit down. (*A solemn pause, during which* FLACHSMANN *writes.*)

MAX (*suddenly and very loudly, while he points at a lesson-picture hanging on the wall*). Ooh, mamma, just look, what a big stork!

MRS. DÖR. (*distressed*). Hush!

FLACHS. (*gruffly*). Sssh! (*After a second pause, during which he has continued his writing, he turns with official affability to the boy and holds out his hand.*) Well, my little man, and what is your name? (MAX *draws shyly back.*)

MRS. DÖR. Give your hand, now, at once. (MAX *does so reluctantly.*)

MRS. DÖR. What is your name?

MAX. Maxi Dörmann. (*Pulls back his hand quickly from* FLACHSMANN *and presses back again to his mother.*)

FLACHS. (*business-like*). Have you the papers?

MRS. DÖR. Yes. (*Gives them.*)

FLACHS. Very well. You will have the decision in due course.

MRS. DÖR. (*shyly*). Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. Hm?

MRS. DÖR. Would it be perhaps possible that the fees could be forgiven me for the two eldest?

FLACHS. (*becoming reflective*). Why?

MRS. DÖR. I just can't raise the money. I work for fifteen shillings a week, and out of that I have to feed six children and after that pay the fees. I don't know how I am to do it.

FLACHS. Well, you see, Mrs. Dörmann (*while he taps her shoulder near the breast*), you could . . . Negendank, go round with this list through all the class-rooms . . .

NEGEN. With pleasure, Head Master. (*Goes out.*)

FLACHS. (*moves his chair nearer to* MRS. DÖRMANN *and lays his hand again on her shoulder. During the conversation he frequently lets his hand slide down on* MRS. DÖRMANN'S *rounded arm; he lays his hand on her thigh, &c. He speaks with lustfully maudlin amiability.* MRS. DÖRMANN *meets his advances with repugnance checked by timidity*). Look, Mrs. Dörmann, could you not possibly earn more?

MRS. DÖR. No; how am I to do that?

FLACHS. Well, perhaps a way could be found.

MRS. DÖR. Oh, if you could do that . . .

FLACHS. Perhaps I might help you.

MRS. DÖR. Yes?

FLACHS. Oh! Yes, I am in close touch with the best circles. . . . If I recommend you, you are recommended . . . and, anyhow, you would be very well paid . . . if I put in a word for you.

MRS. DÖR. Ah! that would be very nice of you.

FLACHS. Hm . . . I will look after it at once. . . . (*Goes to a press to the right, takes out a note-book, then approaches* MRS. DÖRMANN *from behind, and puts his arm round her in a fatherly, affectionate sort of way, while he is unable to suppress the quiver of lustful excitement in his voice.*) You know, my dear Mrs. Dörmann, we must not give up hope yet . . .

MRS. DÖR. (*starts up and draws the little boy towards her*). Excuse me, Mr. Flachsmann . . . I . . . I cannot wait longer . . . I have to go home . . . the little ones . . . and do not trouble yourself about the situation . . . I . . . I can't undertake any more . . . I am well enough . . . just leave them . . . (*Speechless.*)

FLACHS. (*quite cool*). As you will, Mrs. Dörmann. But as to remitting the school fees, do not entertain any hope . . . it cannot be done.

MRS. DOR. But my children must have bread before I pay school fees.

FLACHS. (*contemptuously*). That is *your* view of the matter.

Mrs. Dör. Yes. Maybe I am to let my children starve.

Flachs. (*goes to the middle door and opens it*). Next, please.

(Mrs. Dörmann *and* Max *go off, while* Brockmann *enters.*)

SCENE IX

FLACHSMANN. BROCKMANN, *a little shrivelled bit of a man, remains standing in the background, twirling his hat in his hand.*

FLACHS. Come nearer.

BROCK. Thank you kindly, Head Master, thank you kindly,

FLACHS. Sit down.

BROCK. Thank you kindly, Head Master, thank you kindly. (*Is sitting down in the chair to the left.*)

FLACHS. (*pointing to the chair to the right*). This side! . . . What can I do for you?

BROCK. I come on account of my Rodolph, Head Master.

FLACHS. Hm?

BROCK. Indeed, he has been beaten by Mr. Flemming.

FLACHS. (*greatly interested*). Aha! (*Genially.*) And the boy has been hurt?

BROCK. (*eagerly*). Oh, no!

FLACHS. However, you come to complain of Mr. Flemming.

BROCK. No, no! It was to thank him, to thank him!

FLACHS. (*coldly*). Indeed.

BROCK. Yes, to thank him from the bottom of my heart. Indeed, we can't make anything of the youngster. The youngster is full stronger than my wife and me together. He is too much for his own father and mother. He wanted to beat his own mother! Somebody must have told Mr. Flemming about that, and he got terribly angry and got hold of the youngster and gave him a right whaling. And that was a great help! Now we have only to say, "Mr. Flemming shall get to know that," . . . then he knuckles down. The man has been a God-send to us. He is the only one he has respect for . . .

FLACHS. (*who has listened with a very bad grace and with an occasional ironical "Hm," cuts him short with a rude gesture*). Very well. I will see to it. Good morning.

BROCK. (*taken aback*). Good . . . good morning, Head Master.

FLACHS. (*at the door*). Come on, please.

SCENE X

FLACHSMANN. MRS. BIESENDAHL. *Later* NEGENDANK *and* ALFRED BIESENDAHL.

MRS. BIES. (*forty-year-old woman of faded looks, who in dress, speech, and air endeavours to play the fine lady. She seems very indignant*). Good morning, Head Master.

FLACHS. Good morning, Mrs. Biesendahl; be seated. How can I serve you?

MRS. BIES. Head Master, I am compelled unfortunately to make a grave complaint with regard to Freddy's teacher.

FLACHS. So it's Mr. Flemming again?

MRS. BIES. Precisely.

FLACHS. Such complaints are, I am sorry to say, nothing new to me, dear Mrs. Biesendahl. What is it, then?

MRS. BIES. Head Master, you know that we desire a very good education and that we try to keep away all coarseness from our children. My husband is an official and I am the daughter of an officer in the Customs, so I need hardly tell you that in our house the children hear nothing

nasty. But Mr. Flemming permits himself to use expressions to the children which are simply shocking.

FLACHS. Aha! at his bad language again. What has he said?

MRS. BIES. Head Master, you can imagine that it is not easy for a refined lady to take such gutter language into her mouth; but, after all, we must protect our children. "Mutton-head" is what he has said to my child.

FLACHS. Indeed. (*Presses the knob on the table.*)

NEGEN. (*enters*). Mr. Head Master?

FLACHS. Just fetch Alfred Biesendahl out of the First Class.

NEGEN. Directly, Head Master. (*Goes out.*)

FLACHS. Has he used other abusive terms?

MRS. BIES. (*taxing her memory*). For the moment I cannot think of any. And even the word "Mutton-head" I have learnt first from other children; my boy said nothing of it at home. But it must not rest there. Our children hear no coarse or rude expressions at home, so we cannot allow them to hear anything of the kind in school. My husband was frightfully angry; I had great trouble in pacifying him.

(ALFRED *enters.*)

FLACHS. (*with official affability*). Now, my son. Tell me, now, have you ever been abused in this school?

ALFRED (*wondering*). Abused? . . . No-o!

FLACHS. Think, now. Has not, for example, Mr. Flemming ever said "Mutton-head" to you?

ALFRED (*thinking it over, dry and genial*). Oh, yes!

FLACHS. Perhaps Mr. Flemming has used other abusive words also?

ALFRED. Abusive words? No-o!

FLACHS. (*encouraging him in a pleasant way*). Think, now, just quietly . . . now?

ALFRED. Oh! Mr. Flemming is always making a joke with us; he takes us by the ears and says, "Look out, you rascals, I'll hang you up by the legs," and then we laugh like anything.

(MRS. BIESENDAHL *shakes her head angrily and exchanges a look with* FLACHSMANN.)

FLACHS. Yes, but we are not talking now of cracking jokes; I mean, has Mr. Flemming ever in earnest slanged you; for example . . . "blockhead" . . . or "jackass" . . . or "bullock."

ALFRED. No; "bullock" is what my father always says.

MRS. BIES. Oh, Freddy!

FLACHS. That will do, my son; you can go.

[ALFRED *goes out.*

MRS. BIES. I cannot imagine where the boy has got that . . . my husband never says anything of the kind . . .

FLACHS. You can rely upon it that I will severely reprimand Mr. Flemming; I require my people to

treat children in a kindly spirit and to refrain absolutely from all offensiveness or derision. (*Meaningly.*) Truly, if a man has not a genuine love . . .

MRS. BIES. Yes, Mr. Flachsmann, you may well say that. This Mr. Flemming seems to be altogether an extraordinary person to be training young people. I have been told that he has actually hung up a picture of a naked man in the class and has taught the children from it. I don't think that such things should be in the school; and a teacher, who has to train up young people, should keep himself under a little restraint. (*Pretentiously.*) When a man has no ability, he is not worth anything in any way.

FLACHS. Mmm. . . . Yes, dear Mrs. Biesendahl, this instruction is not after my own heart; but we have to teach it. Well . . . that is all right! (*Slight bow.*) Goodbye.

MRS. BIES. Goodbye, Head Master.

SCENE XI

FLACHSMANN. NEGENDANK. *Then* DIERCKS.

FLACHS. (*calling out*). Negendank!

NEGEN. Head Master.

FLACHS. Have you the absence list?

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. And the excuse notes?

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

(FLACHSMANN *takes the list and seats himself.* NEGENDANK, *with some notes in his hand, also approaches the table.*)

FLACHS. Charles Dierckmann is absent again. What is wrong with him?

NEGEN. Here is the note. (*About to read.*)

DIERCKS (*comes hastily through the middle door*). Mr. Flachsmann! Can I speak to you for a moment?

FLACHS. Yes? Is it something . . .?

DIERCKS. Yes. (*Nods.*)

FLACHS. Negendank, leave us alone.

NEGEN. With pleasure, Head Master. (*Goes.*)

DIERCKS. Great news!

FLACHS. Well?

DIERCKS. Weidenbaum has just come into the class-room and told me that Kleinmüller died last night. That makes a place vacant in the first salary grade. Flemming and myself have the first claim for it. We have the same amount of service.

FLACHS. Well, you need not trouble yourself at all; leave it to me. I have reported on you and him in such a way that you get the promotion and he doesn't.

DIERCKS. Is that so? Ah, but, my dear fellow, the thing does not appear to me by any means so certain.

FLACHS. (*with a glance at the doors*). Pst! (*He goes to the left-hand door and makes sure that there is no one behind it.*)

DIERCKS (*lower*). Who knows whether the rascal has not his friends on the Board? The scoundrel is a fine hand at putting his best foot foremost. That was his way long ago at the Training College. Jack Flemming was always a prime boy. Why, he always had "views" in his compositions and lessons and nothing behind it! And he peached on the other men to the principal!

FLACHS. (*anxious and uneasy*). Is that true?

DIERCKS (*drawing back at once*). Of course, I cannot prove it . . . you need not let it go farther . . . but I could swear to it. Of course, he managed it so that nobody noticed anything. It was not for nothing that it was "Flemming here" and "Flemming there." And look now, if I could once cut out

this rascal, if I could say to his face, "You, the sapient Flemming, the 'gifted' Flemming, 'the universal genius,' you are not promoted, but I am promoted" . . . that would be a real treat, that would be the greatest triumph I could imagine.

(DIERCKS'S *class meanwhile has become noisier and noisier. The gentle prattle at first has gradually risen to a babel of voices.*)

FLACHS. (*almost timidly*). You must really look after your class.

DIERCKS (*opens the middle door, stands in the open class-room door and shouts in*). Will you be quiet? (*Instantly a dead silence prevails.*) If I hear as much as another sound, I'll take the first fellow out and give him a whipping that he will remember. (*Closes the front door.*) Look, now; the Board will sit on Friday morning. They will certainly call for a report from you before then. The Inspector, too, will make inquiries of you during the next few days; and so I wish to supply you with some material.

FLACHS. (*with malicious eagerness*). Ah! Have you anything fresh? What is it, then?

DIERCKS. I lately took his place in his class when he was ill.

FLACHS. Yes, yes! And?

DIERCKS (*cocksure*). Just take your note-book. (FLACHSMANN *quickly seats himself at the desk.*) (*Standing in front of the desk, reading out.*) Now: Mr. Flemming's pupils could repeat the Prophets of

the Old Testament well enough forwards, but could not repeat them backwards.

FLACHS. And yet I have expressly prescribed this exercise.

DIERCKS. Eighty-three per cent. of the scholars were not writing at an angle of 45 degrees, some more slanted, and the greater number far more upright. Mr. Flemming had told the boys they could do for that just as they wished.

FLACHS. That is . . . that is really . . . this audacious rascal is upsetting everything that I have built up.

DIERCKS. On the 27th of May Mr. Flemming, of his own authority, granted permission to a boy to absent himself from two lessons.

FLACHS. It is incredible! Without asking me!

DIERCKS. Mr. Flemming moreover related to his class the "Wanderings of Ulysses," although they are not in the Syllabus.

FLACHS. The man is getting bolder, instead of humbler.

DIERCKS. On the 15th of June . . . that is to-day . . . Mr. Flemming described his superior, the Head Master, as an old fox.

FLACHS. (*with calm complacency*). Indeed! Then he does not appear to think me such an utter fool as he did before.

DIERCKS. Oh, but! Yes, indeed. He said just after that under your management nothing but imbecility was done! The great man of course makes an exception of himself!

FLACHS. Well, well! We will imbecility him.

DIERCKS. Now listen to this: On the 8th of June Miss Gisa Holm visited Mr. Flemming in his class-room; on the 13th of June Mr. Flemming visited Miss Holm in her class-room; and on the 14th of June Miss Holm again visited Mr. Flemming in his class-room; and on each occasion they spent a considerable time, up to thirteen minutes, privately in the respective rooms. What do you think of my observations.

FLACHS. That is very interesting. That is quite . . .

DIERCKS. It cannot go into your report, but it can be used otherwise.

FLACHS. That is really delicious. And to me she is . . . (*all at once recollecting himself*) I mean . . . generally to the rest of us in the school she is always the Lady Disdain.

DIERCKS. She will soon be more approachable.

FLACHS. We must keep a good look-out there. (*In the excitement over the last piece of intelligence has risen and walked up and down. The talking of the class has again swelled to a mighty hubbub.* FLACHSMANN *goes over and places himself in the class-room door.*) (*With official amiability.*) Ah! dear children! What conduct is this? I am sure you are dear good children. Now just be quite quiet and well-behaved and do your lessons.

CHORUS OF CHILDREN (*behind the scene*). Yesss!

FLACHS. Do you promise me that?

CHORUS. Yesss!

(FLACHSMANN *comes back and again closes the middle door.*)

DIERCKS. You must especially make it plain in your report that he is continually undermining your authority; that in the conferences he is always in opposition, and with his eternal proposals and innovations keeps the whole staff in a state of commotion: you can put up with that least of all.

FLACHS. Don't you trouble yourself. Leave it to me. I have myself a pile of things against him. He will not be promoted; you can take your oath of that. (*Timidly.*) But you had better go to your class now . . . .

DIERCKS. Hm.

FLACHS. And . . . look . . . Diercks . . .

DIERCKS. Well?

FLACHS. The other day you wrote business letters during school hours . . . for your insurance agency . . . don't let any one see that.

DIERCKS. If you shut your eyes, nobody will see it.

FLACHS. Well, you are different, but still it is not in order. If the Inspector were to come . . .

DIERCKS. My dear fellow, no one knows better than you do that the Inspector sees nothing but what you show him.

FLACHS. Yes, but somebody from the Department might come.

DIERCKS. Have you ever seen one? And if

anybody does come, he is swaddled up so that his eyes are watering. And you are a good hand at a march-past display.

FLACHS. Just so. And if Flemming sees through it?

DIERCKS. Flemming? The great man carries his nose much too high; he sees nothing. And if he does see anything, he never tells.

FLACHS. And just now you said yourself that he had peached to the head of the Training College.

DIERCKS (*embarrassed for the moment*). Yess! even if . . . that is something different. . . .

FLACHS. Anyhow, I must tell you this: you must not go any farther . . . I certainly won't stand in your way . . . but I cannot permit that. The Inspector has already dropped a remark . . .

DIERCKS. That is not true! Or else you have given him a hint. Otherwise it would never enter his head. I vote we stick to our old bargain: you do nothing to me and I'll do nothing to you. You'll get into no tight place through me, make your mind easy. (*Great uproar and crying from the class, as if a beating were going on.*) Damned pack! (*Goes in a rage into the class-room.*)

FLACHS. (*to himself, looking after him*). Pick-pocket! If I could once get properly rid of you! (*Sits down at the table and after a little time presses the bell.*)

SCENE XII

FLACHSMANN. NEGENDANK.

NEGEN. Head Master!

FLACHS. Negendank! (*confidentially*). Can you report anything to me about Flemming?

NEGEN. About Mr. Flemming? No, Head Master.

FLACHS. You know, I told you you might take a look sometimes . . . and keep your ears open . . . what Mr. Flemming is up to . . . in his class-room . . . and elsewhere . . . don't you remember that?

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. Well? What have you seen?

NEGEN. I, Head Master?

FLACHS. Yes, yes!

NEGEN. Nothing, Head Master.

FLACHS. Nothing? (*Stealthily.*) I told you, you know, you were, without anybody seeing, to go into the room next to Mr. Flemming's class, where you could hear every word plainly, and see everything through the split in the packing of the wall.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. Well, have you done so?

NEGEN. No, Head Master.

FLACHS. (*angrily*). Why not? (NEGENDANK *remaining silent.*) (*Sharply but in suppressed tone.*) What I tell you, you must do, once for all.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. I cannot do everything, you know.

NEGEN. No, Head Master.

FLACHS. You're a dolt.

NEGEN. (*steadily and with military composure*). No, Head Master.

FLACHS. What?

NEGEN. (*as before*). I am no manner of dolt.

FLACHS. Tut! read the notes. (NEGENDANK *puts a pair of pince-nez with tape on his nose and takes the excuse notes.*) What is up with Charles Dieckmann?

NEGEN. (*reads with imperturbable gravity and in a business-like tone*) :—

"HONOURABLE MISTER FLACHSMANN, — The undermentioned certify hereby that on account of a marriage pledge us have over-sleeped the time. This morning sure enough we are the worse of it, you know very well; and when we look at the watch and think it be seven, it is eight sure enough, because it has stopped. Consequentially, please not to punish my son Charles, for it is just myself that has earned the flogging, which like a gentleman you must excuse.

"FRED DIECKMANN."

FLACHS. Yes, a whipping too would be very

healthy for the good people . . . it is a pity they can't get it.

NEGEN. But, Head Master, I think we must still have some regard to the economic conditions; the man has to work hard every day——

FLACHS. Go on, go on. Gustavus Waldau.

NEGEN. (*reads*) :—

"MOST NOBLE PRESIDENT,—With deep regret I take my pen, in order thereby to inform your honour that I have kept my Gussy from school for three days on account of sickness of his person. The doctor holds it for an acute stomach guitar, but I'm thinking inside mumps.

"With most humble reverence,

"LIZZIE WALDAU."

FLACHS. She should have sent notice before, the good woman.

NEGEN. Yes, but I think we may make allowance here, Head Master; she is a very nice, refined woman . . .

FLACHS. (*casually*). What is it she writes? "Most noble . . . ?" (*takes the note and reads*). Hem . . . well . . . I will overlook it this time, but tell her that she must give timely notification of her son's illness. Go on. Hermann Stoppenbrink.

NEGEN. (*reads*) :—

"RESPECTED MASTER,—My gentle better-half has bolted. So I am here all alone and am wife, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle, and all that shall be; therefore Hermann is late in coming to-day.

Don't be angry, Master; the wife has never been any good. This certifies with deep respect,

"JOHN STOPPENBRINK.

"*Widower for the time being, with four children.*"

FLACHS. A pigsty of a household!

NEGEN. So I always thought. The woman was to me in a manner a philological riddle. . . .

FLACHS. Indeed. Go on. Gerard Maass.

NEGEN. (*reads*):—

"MOST HONOURED SIR,—My son cannot go to school, because he has hurt his foot.

"With deep respect,

FREDERICK MAASS."

Comical style! (*A knock.*)

FLACHS. Come in.

SCENE XIII

FLACHSMANN. NEGENDANK. SCHOOL INSPECTOR BRÖSECKE *enters.* (*Great, burly and very well-nourished gentleman, with red, round face, snow-white hair and minister's beard. No spectacles. Long frock-coat buttoned up. His whole appearance breathes good cheer, comfort, and tremendous good-humour. The old boy has a broad, festive way of speaking. He accompanies his words very often with a cheerful laugh,* apropos *of nothing.*)

BRÖS. Good morning, my dear Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. (*treating him with great deference, but without any embarrassment*). Ah, good morning, Mr. Inspector. This is a great honour, Mr. Inspector. Be so very kind as to take a chair.

BRÖS. Thank you, thank you (*about to seat himself on the ordinary chair to the right*).

FLACHS. Pray here, Mr. Inspector, if you please.

BRÖS. (*seats himself in the arm-chair to the left*). Thank you, many thanks, thank you.

FLACHS. Negendank, leave the notes here in the book. I will look after them myself. And take this order and get it signed by all the members of the staff.

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master. (*Goes out.*)

BRÖS. Always on duty! always organising!

FLACHS. Order rules the world, Mr. Inspector.

BRÖS. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha . . . yes, yes. It is always a pleasure to me to see your school, ha-ha-ha . . . everything goes there like grease, like . . . like clockwork . . . ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. Everything military: ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff . . . like the drill-ground . . . ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. Bravo, bravo! You make my post an easy one, dear Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. That gives me a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Inspector. Will you not just hear the teaching?

BRÖS. (*with great energy and laughingly deprecating*). No no no no no no no! Why should I? I know that all is going capitally! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha . . . I should only be interfering and deranging the machinery—ha-ha-ha-ha . . . Yes.

FLACHS. And how is your health, Mr. Inspector?

BRÖS. Aaaaah! . . . that might be better. I have always at night such an oppression in the stomach—ha-ha-ha-ha. . . . Yes (*earnestly*). By the way, now I think of it, I wished to ask you the address of the people you buy your ham from.

FLACHS. I will write it down for you, Mr. Inspector.

BRÖS. The ham is, I tell you . . . oooooh . . . that ham is something really marvellous. The lean

so . . . so firm . . . and still as tender . . . as, as short-dough. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha . . . and the fat! Rosy as apple-blossom! And sweet! (*screwing up mouth and finger*)—sweet as a nut. Just . . . just delicious.

FLACHS. (*who has repeatedly assented, hands him a slip of paper*). This is it, Mr. Inspector.

BRÖS. (*reads*). "Joachim Immensack" . . . (*the rest unintelligible*). Thanks, thanks, dear Mr. Flachsmann, thank you very much. (*The school bell sounds.*) What, is . . . is that not nine o'clock?

FLACHS. Yes, Mr. Inspector.

BRÖS. Oh, then I must see about getting on. I have still to go next door to the girls' school. . . . Ah, it's on my mind that there was something I wanted you . . . (*lays his fingers on his forehead*) hmm . . . No, I can't remember it. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha . . . can't remember it! Well, goodbye, dear Mr. Flachsmann, goodbye; don't stir.

FLACHS. If you please, Mr. Inspector (*escorting him to the door*).

BRÖS. (*suddenly turns round in the door*). Stay, now I have it. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. Right. On Friday morning we have a meeting, and a teacher is to be promoted then into the first salary grade in place of the late . . . eh? . . .

FLACHS. Kleinmüller.

BRÖS. Right: Kleinmüller. It lies, so far as I know, between two gentlemen from your school . . . Mr. Diercks, I think, and Mr. . . .

FLACHS. Flemming.

BRÖS. Flemming, that's it. Which, then, do you recommend, eh?

FLACHS. Mr. Diercks, unquestionably.

BRÖS. Very well. Mr. Diercks. He is the son of our late clerk, Diercks, that we had at the School Board, is he not?

FLACHS. Quite so, Mr. Inspector.

BRÖS. Very well. Then you do not recommend Mr. Flemming?

FLACHS. No, by no means. Mr. Flemming is an offensive and refractory man, full of intellectual arrogance, although he wants nearly every qualification for a good teacher. He is, unfortunately, a very disturbing element in our school system, and will never accommodate himself to strict discipline . . .

BRÖS. (*who for the first time exhibits any expression of serious concern*). Oh . . . I am surprised, Mr. Flachsmann. And yet this Flemming has the reputation of being an uncommonly gifted man! Yes, yes, I have myself often found that. A great talent is as often a curse as a blessing. That has always been a consolation to me. Yes. Well, you will send me a report on both of them, won't you?

FLACHS. Of course, Mr. Inspector; and you will see from these detailed reports that, in justice and reason, only Mr. Diercks can be promoted.

BRÖS. Yes, yes, yes, Mr. Flachsmann. I leave myself entirely in your hands. "Detailed report,"

that's the thing. I shall then be fully acquainted with the case, of course. Very good. Well, *au revoir*.

FLACHS. *Au revoir*, Mr. Inspector. (*Goes out with him.*)

SCENE XIV

FLACHSMANN. NEGENDANK. *Immediately after* FLEMMING.

FLACHS. (*standing before the door on the passage, his hand over his eyes*). Is not that Mr. Flemming standing there?

NEGEN. Certainly, Head Master.

FLACHS. Ask him to come to me.

NEGEN. Directly, Head Master. (*While he goes to the right.*) Mr. Flemming . . . (*The rest unintelligible.*)

(FLACHSMANN *seats himself at his table and takes up a black letter-case.*)

FLEMMING (*enters and walks up to the table*). Mr. Flachsmann?

FLACHS. (*with official impressiveness*). Take a seat. (FLEMMING *sits down.*) You are free at present, are you not?

FLEMMING. Certainly.

FLACHS. (*after an impressive pause*). A report on you has been called for. In order to show you how thoroughly candid and generous I am in dealing with

you, I will communicate to you orally the strictures which I intend to pass.

FLEMMING (*quite cool during the first half of the scene*). Would it not be still more candid and still more generous if you were to let me read the whole report?

FLACHS. The reports are confidential.

FLEMMING. But it is your duty to communicate your strictures to me personally.

FLACHS. It is altogether in my discretion how far I shall discharge this duty.

FLEMMING. A duty should be fully discharged, Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. I am glad to find that you have now discovered that.

FLEMMING. That is no discovery, Mr. Flachsmann; that was always my established principle.

FLACHS. (*irritably*). Let us come to the point. I will take first what concerns your conduct when off duty. The day before yesterday you returned from a carousal with several friends at three o'clock in the morning, and then from pure wantonness flung yourself, with all your clothes on, into the mill-pond and swam about in it for a considerable time.

FLEMMING (*gaily*). Yes, it was capital!

FLACHS. You were then noted by a policeman for unauthorised bathing.

FLEMMING. True.

FLACHS. I wish to draw your attention to the fact that by such proceedings you forfeit in the eyes

of the parents that respect which is necessary for a successful discharge of your duties. A teacher must exercise quite exceptional caution.

FLEMMING (*drily*). If he cannot swim, undoubtedly.

FLACHS. I am not speaking of swimming, but quite generally. You have also attended a public meeting, where the Housing Problem was discussed.

FLEMMING. True. As teacher I am interested in the dwellings of my pupils.

FLACHS. That is unnecessary. A teacher must restrict himself entirely to the work in his class and cheerfully leave all such things to the authorities.

FLEMMING (*still with quiet enjoyment*). But you are quite unaware that I was cordially received by the meeting.

FLACHS. That is a matter of indifference. A teacher should remain entirely apart from public life. That retains for him the respect of the citizens, and is also safer for him.

FLEMMING. Mr. Flachsmann, I attach much more importance to my rights than to my safety.

FLACHS. (*spitefully*). All right, if you are willing to bear the consequences.

FLEMMING. That will I.

FLACHS. To your conduct while on duty still greater exception can be taken, unfortunately.

FLEMMING (*dolefully*). Ah!

FLACHS. On one hot day you brought the children to the yard and allowed them to take off

their jackets and taught them yourself in your shirt-sleeves.

FLEMMING. Do you know that Pestalozzi often did the same?

FLACHS. Pestalozzi could do what he liked. You can *not* do what you like. Apart from the fact that it was highly discreditable and indecent, you did not ask my permission: that is the worst feature of all. The teacher must submit to the superior authority.

FLEMMING (*calmly*). The teacher must not be a slave, says Rousseau; otherwise he makes of the child another slave.

FLACHS. Rousseau is nothing to me. For my school the important thing is what I say. The school is not to make slaves of the children, but subjects.

FLEMMING. Aha!

FLACHS. Further, you have repeatedly overlooked errors in the written exercises of the pupils.

FLEMMING. Mr. Flachsmann! After correcting fifty exercise books, a man at last becomes stupid. The only man that doesn't become stupid is the man that has no occasion to become so.

FLACHS. Oh! I have in my life corrected just as many exercise books and I have not become stupid.

FLEMMING (*drily*). No?

FLACHS. (*stares suspiciously at him*). No. Farther, you permit yourself arbitrary deviations from the programme. For instance, you have set only fifteen towns in England while the programme prescribes thirty-three.

FLEMMING. On the other hand, I have told the children a lot about coal and cotton—things which they daily use and have before their eyes, and which for England and Germany are of more importance than 197 towns. The children enjoy it, and it is more to their advantage than cramming their heads full of dead names, for which afterwards no mortal man would give a straw.

FLACHS. (*with calm malignity*). Mr. Flemming! All these notions you can certainly entertain, only you must not put them into practice in the school. You have also told the "Wanderings of Ulysses" to the Third Class.

FLEMMING. Certainly. On account of their immense poetic value . . .

FLACHS. Mr. Flemming! Poetry is an extra. Poetry has no business in the school . . . so far, of course, as it is not prescribed by the Board. That brings me to another point. It is part of the . . . "reforms," which you are so eager for, that you should try to bring Art into the school. You have hung the walls of your class-room with pictures; you grow flowers in the class-room; you have even gathered the children in the evening, have read them things of Goethe and Schiller, and have provided them with music. By that means you simply give the children a craving, and divert them from the essentials. I must forbid that.

FLEMMING (*still controlling himself*). Mr. Flachsmann! You cannot endure me since the first day I

put foot in your school. That is mutual; no more can I you. Why shall we not speak out honestly? I applied, as you know, a full year ago for a transfer. The officials did not understand my feelings. Boards never know that a man has feelings. The Board "notified" me "in the negative," and directed me to conform to the instructions of my superiors.

FLACHS. (*with triumphant malice*). Was that so?

FLEMMING. But we are two incompatible opposites. You are for repeating a million times "the good old plan," I am for testing the new. That is the abomination of school-mastering; there is no flight of Icarus, no enterprise, no storm, no stress. The man who wishes to do something great wishes for the impossible. You choose to walk in the steps of your hundred thousand predecessors, I seek for new ways, I . . .

FLACHS. (*still with malicious placidity*). Mr. Flemming, the school has no need for your new ways. It needs only faithful discharge of duty, especially loyalty in little things. Teaching is now so perfected that it needs no reforms.

FLEMMING (*mimicking his tone*). Mr. Flachsmann! So the Chinese think; not so the Germans. I must try another way of explaining myself to you. To you school-mastering is a trade, to me it is an art. You imagine you can "regulate" the correct education. . . . Mr. Flachsmann, not with a million "regulations" can you get near the work of a teacher. When I stand in front of my fifty little

chaps, then in front of me rise up fifty souls and fifty living organisms. When the fifty hearts strive towards me and I give to them the best, the fairest that I have, then every third party is an intruder, then wells up from my powers the law of my creative force. When I stand before my fifty little chaps there are one-and-fifty forges at work in whose fire the future, not the past, is wrought. (*Growing warmer.*) You have had for my work and its fruits never a look, never a word. For four years I have been gasping for breath in this atmosphere of intellectual death. For four years you have been screwing me down as if I were a dead wheel in the dead machinery of your school. I am a free creative mind, and create what I will and what I must.

FLACHS. (*as above*). For all that, you must permit me in future to supervise your work somewhat more closely than hitherto. (FLEMMING *rises with a sudden start.*) Why do you rise? I have not yet dismissed you.

FLEMMING (*very curt and gruff*). I wish to stand.

FLACHS. (*watches him with an upward look*). You will henceforth each day submit the exercises of your pupils to me for inspection. (FLEMMING *regards him steadily and in silence. Pause.*) (*As above, gradually becoming less positive.*) You will, farther make written preparation for your lessons and submit these notes to me each time for examination. (FLEMMING *as above. Pause.*) (*As above, growing still more uncertain.*) You will,

farther, send me in a report in writing on the result of each lesson. (*Pause.*) In this way I still hope in time to make an efficient teacher of you.

FLEMMING (*still regards him steadily, and then bursts into a roar of laughter.*) Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

. . . You hope to make an efficient teacher of me? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! . . . Are you, then, a teacher?

FLACHS. (*on the watch.*) So I thought.

FLEMMING. You? A teacher? You are a scholastic cobbler. And a paltry one at that; with no more than a single last. (*Pause.*)

FLACHS. (*has slowly risen and stands behind his table.*) Mr. Flemming, you must know that for this expression you will have to answer before the Disciplinary Board. Meanwhile to me you have to render an account of another matter. Although I ordered it, you have not punished your pupil, Peter Dörmann, who was insubordinate to Mr. Diercks.

FLEMMING. The lad, Peter Dörmann, was wantonly and unjustly accused by Mr. Diercks. The boy justified himself in a proper way. Therefore Mr. Diercks called him a "brazen liar" and attempted to beat him. This the boy resisted, and in doing so he acted rightly.

FLACHS. (*loftily*). That is quite irrelevant. A pupil must, under all circumstances, obey.

FLEMMING. That is your system, I know. All character and originality is crushed. But I do not

acquiesce. Whether I pocket a wrong is my own concern. My pupils I protect.

FLACHS. Well, then the boy will be punished by some one else.

FLEMMING. I do not think so, Mr. Flachsmann. Whoever strikes the little chap must first strike me, and as for me . . . I pay back.

FLACHS. (*scolding*). Mr. Flemming! You will yet find that I am master here.

FLEMMING (*with lofty superiority.*) Mr. Flachsmann! That is an error. You are the higher in rank, but I am the master. I close the conference. (*Goes out.*)

DIERCKS (*comes hastily from the door of the apparatus room*). That is really magnificent.

FLACHS. That breaks his neck.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

SECOND ACT

The assistants' room. On the walls, maps and observation charts, a time-table, and a press with a small reference library; two large portraits of Pestalozzi and Comenius. A door in the middle, a window to the right front. In the middle of the room a table to seat eight or ten persons. On the table stands to left and right a large ink-bottle.

SCENE I

BETTY STURHAHN. WEIDENBAUM.

BETTY (*sits before a high pile of exercise books and corrects with great energy, underlines them with emphasis, revises, bangs down the exercise books and stows them in a heap. Underlining one error with specially ponderous fury*). Thunder and lightning!

WEIDEN. (*enters*). Good morning, madam.

BETTY (*with her usual gruffness*). Morning.

WEIDEN. (*proceeds with circumstantial deliberation to prepare his lunch. He takes a spirit lamp from a press, lights it, and sets on it a small tea-kettle, fetches a cup and pours into it a carefully measured quantity of* [*meat extract, &c.*). I prefer now to boil the water for my soup myself; the porter's wife never cooks it enough. And I have to be so careful about my stomach. (BETTY *remains silent.*) (*Goes out and fetches water in his tea-kettle. Returns.*) Well, have you heard that the business is in full swing? The inquiry about Flemming has begun. Flachsmann has furnished a report, and the report is with the Board by this time. (BETTY *gives a snarl and corrects on.*) Yes, and when the thing has gone before the Board, a man may pack up his traps. It has become serious. He is sacked without mercy. The new Head Inspector lately sent a teacher straight home out of the class and said he need not come back. Simply packed off, without "by your leave." They say that he said, "If a man does not do what he is bid, I'll chase him out, till he hasn't a shoe on his foot." He is a slasher, oh my! (BETTY *silent.*) Well, I must say, I think that is quite right. Subordination there must be. If the teacher does not obey, how are his pupils to learn obedience? If you run risks you'll come to grief. Isn't that so? (BETTY *as before.*) Perhaps I disturb you?

BETTY (*bluntly.*) You do.

WEIDEN. Pardon. (*After a short pause.*) Well,

that is what he has got by his eternal objections and self-conceit and his new ideas. I have been eighteen years with Mr. Flachsmann; but have you ever heard that I have gone against him?

BETTY (*energetically.*) No! Except when it was about the salary question, then you were the bitterest of all; that is, when there was no risk.

WEIDEN. Oh, well, that is a totally different thing, surely? . . . Hem . . . When I want to, I have new ideas myself; but I do not bring them into the school. That only causes trouble, and brings a hornet's nest about one. I do my duty, and don't trouble myself about anything else. No man in the wide world can get anything against me. If the Education Minister himself were to come here he could not get anything against me. I have never in my life got a reprimand. Why doesn't Flemming do the same? I can't be sorry for him. (*The school bell sounds.*)

BETTY (*energetically packs up her exercise books and puts them under her arm*). Well! I will tell you something. To me Mr. Flemming is an abomination, like all other men. Because he is possessed by the fiend of pride, like all other men. And because he is such a silly as to let himself be befooled by a pretty, smooth chit of a face, like all other men. But, it is not much to say, after all he is at least a man.

WEIDEN. Ah! and I am not a man, eh?

BETTY. *You?* Listen. If you are a man then your tea-kettle is a man! Good digestion!

[*Exit through the middle, where she meets* VOGELSANG *and* RIEMANN, *who have just entered. They make way for her almost timidly, and she strides sturdily, without word or look, between them.*

SCENE II

RIEMANN (*resuming an interrupted conversation with triumphant gusto*). Well, of course, he takes my Queen of Clubs with his King and plays the Ace after. I play my Knave of Diamonds. Then I play Ace of Diamonds; down come King and Seven, then Ace of Spades, down come Queen and Eight, then Ace of Hearts, Nine of Hearts and Seven; the Ten of Clubs that had been cast makes 62. Magnificently won! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

VOGEL (*has lit a cigar*). You play Skat every day, I suppose?

RIEMANN. What else is a man to do?

VOGEL. Well, a man might, for instance, read something.

RIEMANN. I read as well.

VOGEL. What do you read?

RIEMANN. Oh! . . . the paper.

VOGEL. How long do you play every day?

RIEMANN. Well . . . about from seven to twelve . . . at most.

VOGEL. Five hours. . . . I say, that is magnificent. And what do you do before?

RIEMANN. I sleep before.

VOGEL. What, you take your dinner nap till seven o'clock?

RIEMANN. No-o-o . . . I drink some coffee . . . and then I go down now and then to my land and dig and rake a little.

VOGEL. A contemplative existence! Does life never bore you?

RIEMANN (*naïvely.*) No.

SCENE III

As before. FLACHSMANN. *Later* DIERCKS *and* RÖMER.

FLACHS. Gentlemen, will you fill up these lists, eh? And . . . very likely Mr. Inspector Brösecke will come to-day and have a look at the classes.

WEIDEN. The Inspector?

FLACHS. Yes. Be a little careful, therefore, that everything is in order, if you please.

THE REST (*nonchalantly.*) Yes . . . Yes.

VOGEL (*holding his cigar hidden behind his back*). How is it we have the honour of a visit? This did not occur before.

FLACHS. Ah! . . . on account of . . . Flemming. It is only that he may have been here and informed himself a little, in case he is questioned.

WEIDEN (*with smirking humility*). Well, Mr. Inspector wrings nobody's neck.

FLACHS. That is as it may be; but everything must be in order.

WEIDEN. Yes, yes . . . I do my duty . . . so far as I am concerned. . . .

RIEMANN (*inquisitively*). Is the inquiry to come off soon?

FLACHS. Yes. (*Short pause.* DIERCKS *and* RÖMER *come in.*) Mr. Flemming has charge in the playground, I think?

DIERCKS. Yes.

FLACHS. Has he not also the next hour free? (*Goes to the time-table and runs his finger along it.*)

VOGEL. (*takes a pull at his cigar.*) Certainly.

DIERCKS. He and Miss Holm, I believe.

FLACHS. Hem! . . . (*After he has found the place.*) So it is; Flemming and Miss Holm . . . (*Exchanges a glance with* DIERCKS). H'm! (*sniffing.*) Gentlemen! Somebody has been smoking here again.

VOGEL. (*also sniffing*). Yes, it seems so.

FLACHS. Give that up, gentlemen. I have already repeatedly forbidden it. You give the pupils an example of extravagance.

VOGEL. (*assenting with perfect composure*). Undoubtedly.

FLACHS. A teacher should not smoke at all.

VOGEL. Hm!

FLACHS. Salaries appear to be still too high. (*Goes out.*)

SCENE IV

As before, except FLACHSMANN. *Later* FLEMMING. *Some of the gentlemen have unfolded their lunch and fetched beer or milk from a press.*)

VOGEL. (*calmly resuming his smoke*). He would like to smoke himself, but his wife does not let him.

DIERCKS (*has walked to the window, to the right front*). Just look at the turmoil down there. (*Opens the window, the distant noise of children playing is heard.*) Just listen to the row. (*Closes the window again.*) It is always the same when he is in charge. And still we have to maintain discipline.

WEIDEN (*has also gone forward*). Yes, and then the children come heated and with red cheeks into the class-room. He lets the children in on him too much; he romps about with them himself as if he were a youngster.

RÖMER (*beardless, high-spirited young fellow of twenty-one years. Jäger's "normal" dress, linen stand-up collar*). He is bound to. A schoolmaster is bound to.

WEIDEN. Indeed! And if a youngster breaks his leg we get into a mess about it.

RÖMER (*emphatically*). Better a broken leg than a broken people. (VOGELSANG *smiles.*)

THE OTHERS. Whoo!

RÖMER. That is the reason why the young ones idolise him. And not merely for that. Because he is, after all, one of the finest schoolmasters there are. (*The rest, except* VOGELSANG, *laugh loud.*)

RIEMANN (*eating.*) Flemming? Flemming? That is a silly fellow. (VOGELSANG *laughs comfortably.*) Ay, so he is too. If he wasn't such a silly fellow he wouldn't be doing things to get him dismissed. And besides, he is, for instance, only a very middling mathematician.

VOGEL. Have you proved that to him, Riemann?

RIEMANN. That is nothing to the point, sure? I know it from Schwensen, who says it too.

DIERCKS. Well, does he know anything possibly in other branches? It is all pure claptrap. He knows how to put on a show; a blab he is.

WEIDEN. Yes, and a bad comrade. He always puts himself forward. His way of always showing off by holding forth in public and making pedagogic dissertations . . . you must yourselves admit that is not comradely. (*Assent.*)

VOGEL. (*imperturbably*). Yes, and the worst is (*general attention*)—the worst of all is that he knows more than the whole of us together. (*Scoffing and shouts of protest.*)

RIEMANN. That is not true.
DIERCKS. Ridiculous! Rubbish!
WEIDEN. We'll drop that.
RÖMER. Indeed, he does know! Indeed he does! } *Together.*

VOGEL. Well, boys, if you have any honesty, you must admit that yourselves. When Flemming at the conference lets himself out properly, we all sit there like rushlights and the sorriest bit of a dip is our friend Flachsmann. Flachsmann knows nothing except his miserable *Sic volo, sic jubeo*— I will have it so, and what I will must be done. Ha, ha, ha! Boys, it was a treat, to be sure, the day Flemming stood up and said as calm as you like, "Mr. Flachsmann, the chief thing in the school is not you, but the children!"

DIERCKS (*with malicious triumph*). Just so; that is the reason why he is getting the run now.

RÖMER. Is that so? We'll see that first. That would be a shabby trick. Then we protest. (*Laughter.*) If they knew up at the Board what a genius he is—— (*Loud derisive laughter from the others except* VOGELSANG.)

RIEMANN. Dear Römer, you are still a little too green to have your say with colleagues of experience. Get a little experience first. Get twenty years older first; judgment comes with years.

RÖMER. Well, if that is your only hope . . .

RIEMANN (*not understanding*). How so? hope?

VOGEL (*with a complacent laugh, with a fatherly*

air to RÖMER). Comrade, I must confess you might be a little more subdued; but I will by all means admit that when we were at your age we were the same sort of cocky dogs, only we have now forgotten it. Sentiment's good . . . and you are in the right too . . . only the temperature a little lower, what do you say?

RÖMER (*docilely*). Yes.

RIEMANN. What do you mean by that? That's cheek. (RÖMER *starting up again.* VOGELSANG *calms him and presses him down again on his seat.*)

WEIDEN (*sarcastic and moralising*). That is the spirit of pride, which, I am sorry to say, is rampant among our young colleagues and by which our friend Flemming is possessed from head to foot. I must say, it is very much to my liking that the new Head Inspector has made up his mind to make a clean sweep there. He chucks the unruly elements simply to the deuce. That is the man for me. Monsieur Flemming is always thinking he must "elevate" the school and always still more "elevate."

DIERCKS. I tell you, he never thinks of the school. The fellow has no heart for the school. It is himself he wants to elevate. Just a common place-hunter he is.

VOGEL. No, no.

RIEMANN. So he is. And then, what is the meaning of all this idiotic rubbish: "Parents' Evenings, Parents' Evenings"? He wants "to establish the natural alliance between parents and

teachers." "The whole people are to have a share in the work of the school." What is the meaning of such twaddle? What do the parents know about children? I am very glad that the parents keep clear of me. And what comes of it? Only more work for us. "On at least one evening in the month," he thinks, "parents and teachers should meet together." I have no such notion. I have no time in the evening.

WEIDEN. Not at all.
DIERCKS. No. } *Together.*

RIEMANN (*growing warmer and warmer*). And after all, we had better see that the work of the teacher is simplified. What is the use of trash like geometry and history and such like? When the children learn to read and write that is quite enough. What more do they want?

VOGEL. Riemann, don't be so niggardly.

RIEMANN (*foolishly*). Niggardly . . . How?

VOGEL. And then you have left out another necessary branch. Arithmetic.

RIEMANN. Well, well, Arithmetic.

VOGEL. They will need that later on for Skat.

RIEMANN (*more and more excited*). And then the next is that nonsensical stuff, "We must bring Art into the school." Such rot! What do the children know of Art? Art is entirely a thing for rich folk. And then: "Growing flowers in the school." He has all the window-sills full of flowers. (*Silly laugh.*) Just as if the children were all to be gardeners!

WEIDEN. To begin with, I have moral scruples about this so-called "æsthetic culture."

DIERCKS. Quite right.

RIEMANN (*simultaneously, very excitedly*). Yes. But stop, I must tell you something. I was lately one day in his rooms—I must tell you this. He has a picture there. There is a soldier sitting with a plumed hat on his head, sitting before a table laid out, and holding up a glass of champagne. And a woman sits on his knee and he has his arm round her waist. And the two look as bold as brass out of the picture. What's this it's called? I . . . he told me what it's called . . . m-m-m . . . Ram . . . Rem . . . right—"Rembrandt als Erzieher" is the name of it. (VOGELSANG *and* RÖMER *laugh loudly.*) What is there to laugh at?

VOGEL. Nothing, nothing; tell us the rest.

RIEMANN. Well, I asked him, "Would you hang up this picture now in the school-room?" "Why not, dear Riemann?" said he.

VOGEL (*laughing*). Dear Riemann, he has been quizzing you properly again.

DIERCKS. But he has a half-naked figure standing on his school press! And that is what is called Art! No such bawdry for me, thank you. It is a real blessing that the fellow is to be hunted out of the school.

VOGEL. But, boys, if he is so dead-broke as all that, I don't understand why you get so excited over him. You really are only showing what an infernal respect you have for him.

RÖMER. Just so. (*The rest set up together a laugh of angry derision.*)

DIERCKS. "Dead-broke." He is not dead yet. Who knows how that fellow will wriggle himself out yet? He knows far too well how to play the good boy. He has it in him. (*With sudden rage.*) But this I will tell you: if the scoundrel is not hunted, I will apply to the Board for a transfer, on the ground that I will not work any longer with such a fellow. (VOGELSANG *gives a short laugh.*) Yes, you always take his side, Vogelsang. (*The school bell sounds; all rise to go out.* DIERCKS, *catching a sudden idea.*) Well, ask Flachsmann what Flemming has said about our staff. We are all dead and rotten; he is going to waste here among us; he is the only one that is alive. The whole body has no striving after higher things, no idealism; he is the only one has it. We are rotten duffers; he is a second Pestalozzi. He said those very words. If you don't believe me, go down at once to Flachsmann and ask him; we have both heard it. You won't think, I suppose, that we are both lying to you?

VOGEL (*reflectively*). That was certainly going it strong.

RÖMER. That is a shabby trick. If he said that, I will never speak to him again.

DIERCKS. He said things of that kind before. (*Tries to convince* RÖMER. FLEMMING *enters, hangs his hat on a hook*). I must to my class. (*Slips out the first with scarcely dissembled haste.*)

FLEMMING. Ha! it's cooler in here than outside. Boys, that is a stew. Have you left me ever a bottle of beer? (*General silence.* RIEMANN and WEIDENBAUM *slip out quietly.* RÖMER *goes brusquely past* FLEMMING *and cuts him;* FLEMMING *looks after him;* VOGELSANG *goes out last thoughtfully, with a searching look at* FLEMMING. FLEMMING *looks after them bewildered and then breaks into wild laughter.*) Ha, ha, ha, ha! My case must be a bad one; they are edging off from me. My colleagues shrink away with a shudder, the "colleagues!" Ha, ha, ha! (*Again looks towards the door for a moment, then stretches his arms upwards with a disencumbering movement.*) Well, well. (*Seats himself at the table to the right, sets to work at a pile of exercise books, which lie on it, and begins to correct, but soon rests his head on his hand and stares straight before him.*)

SCENE V

GISA. FLEMMING.

GISA *enters unobserved by* FLEMMING. *She is wearing roses in her bosom and her hair, under the left arm she carries a pile of exercise books. She watches* FLEMMING *a moment and then "hems."* FLEMMING *starts up and then smilingly nods to her.*

GISA. May I correct here with you? Above it is so hot.

FLEMMING. I beg you will, Miss Holm.

GISA (*lays her exercise books on the table and seats herself to the left*). What ails you? You were sitting quite absorbed there, when I came in.

FLEMMING. I was meditating on my own enormity, and the amiability of other men.

GISA. That sounds wrong. What ails you?

FLEMMING. When I came up just now from the playground my colleagues met my questions with icy silence. They cut me; I am boycotted.

GISA. Then you must have been slandered. And

no person except Mr. Diercks can have done that. I warned Mr. Vogelsang quite lately; he would not believe me; but Mr. Diercks is a schemer, I see it in him.

FLEMMING (*calmly*). Yes, he is a blackleg. One of your well-fed blacklegs, fat and funky. So long as they have to look one in the eye, they are tolerably brave; when they can look aside, they are the greatest knaves.

GISA. You know all that? And yet you are often so free-spoken to him?

FLEMMING. Yes, I fear no schemer. (*Bending forward.*) Look you, dear young lady, in the whole animal kingdom there is no greater donkey than the dirty dog. He recognises always too late that he is really a mutton-head. (GISA *laughs.*) That is the zoology of moral philosophy.

GISA. Won't you, then, take your colleagues to task?

FLEMMING (*a short laugh*). No. 'Tisn't worth while.

GISA. You are fearfully proud.

FLEMMING (*still correcting exercises*). I daresay I am.

GISA. That is fine. . . . But you are depressed.

FLEMMING. Why?

GISA. Because you are to be dismissed.

FLEMMING (*bends over his book*). Hm!

GISA (*drumming on the table with comical anger*). Now leave that stupid correction alone.

FLEMMING. I must, unfortunately.

GISA. Nonsense. I must also, but I don't do it. (FLEMMING *laughs out.*) (*Goes up to him, takes the pen from his hand, bangs the exercise book to, and lays it away.*) Now! Will you set no home-work to-day? Teaching is stopped owing to the heat! There are 30 degrees in the shade!

FLEMMING. That must be a little overdrawn.

GISA. Oh, no. (*Runs to the thermometer, which hangs near the door.*) My goodness! Only 19 degrees. Do you know what? We'll help it a little. (*Takes the thermometer from the wall.*) How many degrees must it be before school stops?

FLEMMING. Twenty-two.

GISA (*takes the thermometer and blows vigorously on it.*) I have it.

FLEMMING (*laughing*). Have you always such an aversion to being in school?

GISA. Aversion? Why these extenuating phrases? I know nothing that breaks up holidays more horribly than school work.

FLEMMING. Ah! now.

GISA. Look! You can give me a piece of advice.

FLEMMING. Certainly.

GISA. Just tell me some folly which is quite decorous and is still simply colossal.

FLEMMING. And what do you want this folly for?

GISA. I will commit it. So that the Board may dismiss me.

FLEMMING. Why, then, did you become a mistress at all?

GISA. Because my step-father forced me to. I wanted to study music. But I wasn't allowed.

FLEMMING. And why don't you give your step-father the slip?

GISA. Because I cannot desert my mother. Because I . . . but please do not laugh at me . . . (*lowering her eyes*) because . . . because she says that I am her only comfort. (*Pause.*) At first it was very nice. Learning every day, that was delightful. I should like to be always learning. But teach I cannot possibly do. And then that dreadful repetition. And the correcting . . . I can't do it. And then I am so awfully sorry that I am such a bad teacher; the little things are so sweet. But first I am too soft-hearted, and when I become strict they laugh in my face. I can't manage this frightful lot of children. (*With comical simplicity.*) Ah! if they were my own! (*Short pause.*) When I think of you . . . goodness! You curb the children with a firm hand, and still their hearts fly to you.

FLEMMING. And yet I have fought the same battle myself.

GISA (*astonished*). How so?

FLEMMING. I do not know whether you are aware that I was a locksmith for six whole years.

GISA. A locksmith!

FLEMMING (*without sentimentality, narrating with a quiet smile of recollection*). My guardian declared

schoolmastering would be nothing for poor children and stuck me in to learn the locksmith trade. All day I stood at the anvil and turning-lathe; in the evening I went to the Technical School. And when I got home out of the Technical School, I fell to at the handful of miserable books which I had. But at that age one can sleep as greedily as one can eat, and that is saying a good deal. My God! how delicious it was to lay my arms on the book and my head on my arms and to fall fairly asleep. The next day I suffered qualms of conscience like a gamester who has played away all he has in one night. (*With pensive melancholy.*) Ah, no! no gambler knows such pangs. It was an awakening without hope, a grey, cheerless dawning. The more my bodily powers felt refreshed, the more furiously I raged against myself for succumbing.

GISA (*with heartfelt sympathy*). And how did you at last become a teacher?

FLEMMING. When I had been two years a journeyman, I succeeded in getting into the Training College. The principal overlooked the gaps in my scholarship; he felt, like me, that a schoolmaster I must be. And then came a glorious time of work and hunger. I spent most of the winter in bed, for I could not afford myself coals. I had threepence a day for breakfast and supper and three free meals a week. At first I had five free meals; but for two of them I had to pay with my principles, and I remained away. On Sunday, for instance, I had no dinner. And it so happened

that every Sunday my landlady made a wonderful meat soup which sent its fragrance right up to my room. Once I was on the point of giving in. My landlady was holding a huge loaf in her hand and was cutting it fine and deep. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say, "Give me the piece of bread"; but I held my hands behind my back and squeezed one against the other so tight, so tight. When I did that, nothing would shake me. So I instantly turned on my heel and ran up the stairs. Of course, in spite of all this, I had to go in debt; but I became a schoolmaster, and so with all my debts I was a rich man! (*Short pause.*)

GISA (*with her hands folded in front of her knee and with a far-away look of still, wistful exaltation.*) You are so strong, so brave. (*A short, faint laugh.*) Ha, ha! when I was still a quite silly little goose . . . sillier even than I am now . . . I could not think of a strong, brave man except with great beard and bronzed chest. I dreamt that my husband must be a sailor.

FLEMMING (*looking at her full in the face*). And now?

GISA (*starts suddenly, blushes red all over and stammers in distress and confusion*). Now? Oh . . . I . . . I don't know what I have been saying. I have certainly been saying something stupid again . . . I . . . (*Grasps at an exercise book and begins correcting with comical energy.* FLEMMING *regards her a moment, then looks down, sighs deeply, and then takes an exercise book and mechanically turns over*

the leaves.) (*Her calm tone restored, but without looking at him.*) Now I see why you have become nothing higher. I have so often thought: a man of so much ability and force of character, why has he become nothing higher than a schoolmaster?

FLEMMING (*gravely*). There is nothing higher than a schoolmaster.

GISA. Oh yes! I know. But say a master in a High School . . . or a professor in the University. . . .

FLEMMING. To my mind, my dear young lady, the Elementary schoolmaster is the highest. Aye, and the poorer, the more forlorn, the more neglected, the dirtier the children, so much the more glorious is the battle. You will hardly believe that I had a great longing to teach half-witted children.

GISA. Ah!

FLEMMING (*with genial cheeriness*). Ah! is there any greater pleasure than to loosen one by one the thousand bonds which clasp the imprisoned spirit? Than to lure forth the light which glimmers so far, far away behind thousandfold glooms. To seek out in his darkest den the great, bloated dragon of stupidity, to slay him, and to lead forth in safety the Princess Soul: that is the knightliest pleasure that I know.

GISA. And you were fated to encounter Flachsmann!

FLEMMING (*with a bitter laugh.*) Yes! (*Jumps up.*) His spectre, carrying its head in its hand. His memorandum book is really his head. If he has

anything in the book he need never have it in his head; the thought holds him on his feet. My God, what a fellow! Let it be a tyrant, if you like, but at least one who has some decent ability. But this man does not object to being a nonentity, so long as, like the axis of the earth, everything turns about him. He is quite satisfied so long as he is on top, like the fly on the back of a horse.

GISA. Ah! but you will get rid of him. And, of course you will get a place at another school.

FLEMMING. After being dismissed? After coming to grief? Certainly no place which I should choose. In Germany none. To be sure, there are German schools abroad. But, alas! no school in Germany. (*With melancholy mockery.*) "Ah! full many other maidens; but the One . . . it is not she."

GISA. You love the school as if it were a girl?

FLEMMING (*after a moment's reflection, hesitatingly*). Yes. Perhaps it is something like that. And yet that, alas! is not love enough. That is a selfish love. It is a spiritual joy, which enraptures me at my school work. The moment I begin teaching a ferment stirs within my head of a thousand notions as to how things now are, and of a thousand hopes how it might yet be with the spirit of man? But when I ask myself: Do you really love the children? You do for them perhaps all you can, you wish for each of them the best . . . but is that love . . . love? Then sounds the word in my breast with a hollow clang. I long to feel for once this unutterable glow, this inexhaustible stream that

lavishes the very life-blood. (*He has stopped before the picture of Pestalozzi and enthusiastically stretches his arms towards it.*) He could do that—Pestalozzi, the great, the holy! His thoughts were confused and wayward, his speech chaotic; but from the gloom of his thoughts bursts the nightingale of love, sweet and full and unwearied. So long as I am a schoolmaster I must wrestle with that tremendous mystery: where is the path which leads to the great love?

GISA (*after a pause, with timid awe*). Do you know how it strikes me? I had a little brother who died when he was eight. Rudolph was his name. And when I cannot manage one of the little ones, when in despair I am half inclined to run away, then I say quietly to myself, "Think that it is Rudy." And then I get on a little better.

FLEMMING (*has approached her and takes her left hand with his own*). Dear . . . dear young lady. That were perhaps the way . . . (*looking at her thoughtfully all the time*). When you came here to our school I thought that you looked very sweet. But that is a mistake; you are sweet.

GISA (*bends her head, softly and with embarrassment*). Oh, no!

FLEMMING. No? Among all the girls whom I know there is none who so . . . whom I . . . I mean, who so . . . (*He falls into great confusion.*) Pardon me, lady . . . these last few days my head is in such a whirl. . . I am afraid I have committed another folly. (*Embarrassed pause.*)

GISA (*rises and moves slowly to the window*). It is so hot here. May I open the window? The sun is off.

FLEMMING. If you please.

(*When* GISA *has opened the window a distant song, which before was barely audible, now swells in fuller volume. The girls of the neighbouring school are singing in three parts the first stanza of the song "Annie of Tharau."*)

"Annie of Tharau, to her I will hold,
She is my life and my goods and my gold.
Annie of Tharau has given her heart
Into my keeping till death do us part.
Annie of Tharau, my queen on her throne,
Thou art my soul and my flesh and my bone."

GISA (*during the singing*). Ssh! they are singing in the girls' school; isn't it lovely? (*She stands back a little from the window.*) FLEMMING *stands behind her and listens also.* (*When the song has ceased.*) What a sweet sound—don't you think so? So jolly! I am awfully fond of hearing children sing. Even when it is only a quite simple melody.

FLEMMING. The heart of a child always sings in unison. And sings the same part as the mouth does. That suits so beautifully. That is Krause's class; he is a real musician; I have often when . . .

GISA. Ssh! they are beginning again.

SONG OF THE GIRLS.

"E'en as a palm-tree that springeth on high,
Bowed though it be by the storms of the sky;

So all our sorrows and sufferings and tears
Root our love deeper through vanishing years.
Annie of Tharau, my queen on her throne,
Thou art my soul and my flesh and my bone."

(GISA *stands with her face behind the window, and as she begs silence stretches her left hand behind her. She thus remains in the excitement of listening.* FLEMMING *tremblingly takes her hand*; GISA *glances at him with a swift turn of the head and as swiftly looks again through the window. He lays his right hand on her right shoulder ; she closes her eyes and lets her head sink slowly backward on his breast; he kisses her on the forehead. After remaining thus for an instant,* GISA *turns, flings in an access of passion her arms around his neck and buries her head on his breast.*)

FLEMMING (*slowly raises her head; with low-toned, faltering tenderness*). Gisa!

GISA (*the same, as it were feeling for the intimate word of address*). Jack! How strange that I am now to say "thou." May I once venture?

FLEMMING (*softly*). Yes, venture once.

GISA (*softly*). Thou.

FLEMMING (*the same*). Thou. (*Presses his mouth on hers in one long kiss. The door slowly and noiselessly opens, and in it appears* DIERCKS *and* FLACHSMANN. *At the first words of* DIERCKS *the couple start asunder.*)

SCENE VI

As before. FLACHSMANN. DIERCKS.

DIERCKS (*sneeringly*). Hm, hm, I am awfully sorry to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*. I merely wished to bring you the pleasant intelligence, dear Flemming, that I have just got word of my promotion. As you appear to have decided on getting married so soon, I am doubly sorry that you are not promoted. . . .

FLEMMING (*immediately recovering his composure, with easy good-humour*). Dear Diercks! No doubt you meant to surprise us by revealing your real sentiments in your hour of triumph. But you are mistaken; we knew long ago that you are a low cad.

DIERCKS (*foaming.*) What? What? The . . . the . . .

FLEMMING (*genially*). Oh, certainly, ask Miss Holm. Were we not saying half an hour ago that Mr. Diercks is a low cad?

GISA. No.

FLEMMING. No?

GISA. A "sharper" was what we said.

FLEMMING (*to* DIERCKS). Yes, quite right. I beg pardon—a sharper.

FLACHS. Mr. Flemming, you have in the first place to deal with your superior officer and with none other. You have within the sacred walls of the schoolhouse perpetrated the indecency . . .

FLEMMING (*quite calmly*). Stay. You are going to say something indelicate. Permit me first to show the lady out. (*Takes* GISA *by the hand.*)

GISA. Jack, if they attack you, I will stand by you.

FLEMMING (*smiling*). Against such people, my child? It isn't worth while. (*He kisses her hand.*) *Au revoir.*

GISA. *Au revoir.* [*Exit.*

FLEMMING. Mr. Flachsmann, what have you to say to me?

FLACHS. (*with cold complacency*). Nothing. I will confine myself to my report. The cup is now full. If anything were still wanting to show you in your true light, at all events now it is . . .

SCENE VII

As before. NEGENDANK.

NEGEN. (*enters and remains standing at the door with his usual imperturbability*). Mr. Head Master, the School Commissioner is within.

FLACHS. What . . . School Commissioner? You mean the School Inspector?

NEGEN. No, Mr. Head Master. Mr. Government School Commissioner Professor Doctor Prell is within.

FLACHS. (*distractedly*). Where . . . where . . . is . . . is he? Show him into my room. . . I will come at once. . . .

NEGEN. Mr. School Commissioner is already here.

S. C. PRELL (*behind the scene*). Where is the room?

WEIDEN (*appears along with him with deepest reverence*). Here, if it please Mr. School Commissioner.

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SCENE VIII

As before. PRELL. WEIDENBAUM.

PRELL (*a little, thick-set, broad-shouldered gentleman, with a powerful head, short, shiny grey hair, standing on end; complexion rather ruddy; bottle-nose; short, grey moustache and short neck. He is dressed all in black and scrupulously neat; coat with skirts rounded in front; wears a low chimney-pot, flashing spectacles with circular lenses, and creaking, very shiny boots. He is an extremely brisk, bustling person, always walks with very short, quick steps, and whenever he appears has the chimney-pot in his right hand and sundry documents in his left. In his bearing and air he has the look of a half-pay officer, and almost always speaks in snappish tones and in a high voice. His articulation is sharp, and he generally speaks in little snippety sentences and at the same pace as his steps. After each sentence he generally makes a short pause. He walks straight over to the left end of the table and sets down his papers and his hat*). Good morning.

THE OTHERS. Good morning, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL (*to* FLACHSMANN, *who, bowing low, has cautiously approached*). You are Mr. Flachsmann?

FLACHS. At your service, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. I am Government School Commissioner Prell.

FLACHS. (*bows low, with tremulous voice*). A high honour. . . permit me to offer the School Commissioner a warm . . . warm welcome.

PRELL (*seated and turning over the documents*). Thanks. But, welcome or not, I am here. (*Notes something with ink on his papers.*) This is your hour for teaching?

FLACHS. Certainly, School Commissioner. . . .

PRELL. How comes it that I find you here and not in the class-room?

(DIERCKS *and* WEIDENBAUM *slip out as quick as they can go.*)

FLACHS. (*with assurance*). I had official business here, School Commissioner. It was my duty to detect this gentleman (*pointing at* FLEMMING) in the very act of desecrating in the most shameless way the sacred floor of the school.

(FLEMMING, *who has been arranging his books and standing to the right of the table, suddenly advances a couple of paces.*)

PRELL (*to* FLACHSMANN). What do you mean by that?

FLACHS. A moment ago I found this gentleman tenderly embracing one of the ladies of the staff.

PRELL (*advancing to* FLEMMING *with quick steps, very loud and brusque*). What is your name?

FLEMMING (*equally loud and brusque*). My name is Flemming.

PRELL (*after a short pause, all at once lowering his tone*). Why do you yell like that?

FLEMMING (*with matter-of-fact courteousness*). I presumed, Mr. School Commissioner, that, as you spoke so loud, you must be deaf.

PRELL (*measuring him, then again barking*). Nonsense. Hear all right. But you are an unruly customer. You are the man against whom the inquiry is pending?

FLEMMING. At your service, School Commissioner.

PRELL (*tapping him on the collar of his coat with the forefinger*). You are the man that has brought me here. I will submit your proceedings to a very searching examination.

FLEMMING. Very well, School Commissioner. (*Goes from the right to the exit.*)

PRELL (*takes up his papers and hat*). You will now forthwith submit your class to me.

FLEMMING (*with confident cheerfulness*). With pleasure, School Commissioner.

PRELL (*again stands close in front of him and measures him anew; then sharply*). We shall see that.

FLEMMING. Certainly, School Commissioner.
PRELL (*imperiously*). Show me your class.

[*Exit with quick steps.* FLEMMING *behind,* FLACHSMANN *last.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THIRD ACT

(The scenery of the first Act)

SCENE I

NEGENDANK. KLUTH. *Later* FLACHSMANN.

(NEGENDANK *engaged in placing chairs round the writing-table.*)

KLUTH (*porter of the neighbouring girls' school, a great, sturdy fellow, who in contrast with his build betrays a prodigious timidity, wears a servant's cap, which he removes on entering. He has papers in his hand, into which he peers cautiously*). Is the coast clear?

NEGEN. Quite clear. Flachsmann is teaching, and the School Commissioner is beside him, listening.

KLUTH. Here are some lists I was to bring over. (*Gives* NEGENDANK *an envelope.* NEGENDANK *takes it and lays it on the writing-table.*) (*Glancing round from time to time.*) Well. This is a fine smash, to be sure.

NEGEN. Yes. We have given the sack to one of them.

KLUTH. That Prell is a fine dangerous customer, to be sure.

NEGEN. (*makes with his hand a sign of assent*). He bites. And the worst of it is that he knows something of what he is about.

KLUTH. Oh, my!

NEGEN. There is no humbugging him. He sees everything.

KLUTH. Aye, indeed. You need a long spoon to sup with men like that.

NEGEN. He! He sups nothing. (*Moving nearer to* KLUTH.) The second day after he came Flachsmann got a beautiful breakfast ready, and, when it came to ten o'clock, says he: "Perhaps Mr. School Commissioner would please to take a modest breakfast." You ought to have seen the glasses of the spectacles! "Thanks," he snorts, "never take breakfast." Mark me, dear Kluth, a boss who takes no breakfast is dangerous.

KLUTH. Yes, yes. And so he is done for.

NEGEN. Who?

KLUTH. Mr. Flemming.

NEGEN. Flemming?

KLUTH. Yes, who are you talking about, then?

NEGEN. Not Flemming. You're the very deuce. It is Diercks he has chucked.

KLUTH. Diercks?

NEGEN. Yes, of course.

KLUTH (*inquisitive and uneasy*). What for?

NEGEN. Because he fabricated school exercises. He palmed off things for school exercises which he had done himself. But that is not the worst. He has directly put up the children to lying and cheating.

KLUTH. Oh, my! Oh, my! and then he has sacked him?

NEGEN. On the spot. "Leave the school-house this moment, and never show yourself again." He flew out, how, he did not know himself.

KLUTH. Well, I must say this much: a thing like that could never happen in our school.

NEGEN. (*grievously offended*). Well, to be sure! I will say this much, my dear Kluth: even if we had here three more Diercks, still our Alma Mater stands ever a hundred miles above your so-called Finishing Academy. (FLACHSMANN'S *voice is heard.*)

KLUTH (*in a flurry approaches the exit*). But how is that? . . . I . . . something . . .

NEGEN. Just wait till the Commissioner has been with you. He inspects the servants too!

KLUTH. Does he? Well, I must run.

NEGEN. I guessed as much.

KLUTH (*runs into* FLACHSMANN *in the doorway; stuttering out some gibberish*). Ah . . . ah . . . I . . . hav-hav . . . be-be . . . ek . . . the quarterly returns her . . . here.

FLACHS. (*distractedly*). All right, all right.

[KLUTH *exit.*

SCENE II

FLACHSMANN. NEGENDANK.

FLACHS. (*rigged out in black. He is completely distracted and absent-minded, and constantly wipes the perspiration from his forehead*). Have you put in the chairs? Are they quite enough? (*He begins counting them over and over again but never finishes, because his mind wanders off.*) Is my necktie straight?

NEGEN. Permit me. (*Sets his scarf right.*)

FLACHS. (*darts off and makes a couple of steps. Then hastily going up to* NEGENDANK). Have you anything yet . . . anything of Flemming . . . I mean: Can you tell me anything about Mr. Flemming . . . anything you have seen?

NEGEN. About Mr. Flemming? No, Head Master.

FLACHS. (*with suppressed excitement*). Have you not watched him . . . as I told you?

NEGEN. (*perfectly imperturbable*). No, Mr. Head Master.

FLACHS. (*quivering*). Why not?

NEGEN. A soldier does not eavesdrop, Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. (*shrieking with senseless fury*). Bosh! blasted bosh! You are a servant here, and not a soldier.

NEGEN. A soldier always remains a soldier, Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. (*yelling still louder*). I will give you the sack, I will . . . (*suddenly glancing outside and recovering himself, close to* NEGENDANK'S *face*). I will repay you for that.

NEGEN. (*without moving a muscle*). Very well, Mr. Head Master.

FLACHS. (*again begins running aimlessly about, goes to his table and knocks about the things which are lying on it. Fumbles at the bottom of his coat and waistcoat; suddenly disquieted*). Have I whitened myself behind? Give me another brush.

NEGEN. All is right, Mr. Head Master.

FLACHS. Better give me another brush. (NEGENDANK *takes a brush from a drawer of the writing-table and does so.*) (*Again with sudden impulse.*) Have you seen Diercks since? Has he said anything to you?

NEGEN. Mr. Diercks? No, Mr. Diercks has only . . . (*The Commissioner enters.*)

FLACHS. Hush!

SCENE III

As before. PRELL.

PRELL (*enters with quick step and stops beside* NEGENDANK, *who stands bolt upright. After he has benevolently surveyed him*). Good morning!

NEGEN. Good morning, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. You have summoned the whole staff here for eleven o'clock?

NEGEN. According to order, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Then of course the children are left without supervision. What do "we" do then, Mr. Negendank?

NEGEN. We simply send all the children to the playground, and I undertake the control.

PRELL. Indeed. You are competent to do that?

NEGEN. Quite, Mr. School Commissioner. That is what I do when the ladies and gentlemen meet here to receive their so-called salary.

PRELL. Indeed. Well, then, leave us alone now.

NEGEN. With pleasure, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Stay. One thing more. Before the conference Mr. Flemming is to come to me by himself.

NEGEN. To command, Mr. School Commissioner.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV

FLACHSMANN. PRELL.

PRELL (*seated in* FLACHSMANN'S *chair*). Mr. Flachsmann.

FLACHS. (*hastens to the* COMMISSIONER'S *left side*). Mr. School Commissioner?

PRELL. You still owe me an explanation, how Diercks could perpetrate this unprecedented fraud.

FLACHS. (*stuttering*). Yes, Mr. School Commissioner, I—I do not really know . . .

PRELL. "I do not really know" is a nonsensical answer. You surely know that you are appointed here to know, don't you?

FLACHS. Certainly, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. It is no question of one momentary transgression. The fellow's whole class is completely neglected. How do you explain that? How do you explain the fact that only a few weeks ago you reported most favourably on this man, and recommended him for promotion?

FLACHS. I placed blind confidence in the man, and . . .

PRELL. (*cutting him short*). Why?

FLACHS. Because . . . because he had previously done very good work; yes, very good.

PRELL. Well. That is quite possible. But if your confidence was ever so blind, even a blind man must have seen that the fellow was idling.

FLACHS. (*tries to give a brighter aspect to the matter*). I—I have again been too good-natured, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Well; why, then, were you not good-natured towards other members of your staff who deserved it much more? How was that? (FLACHSMANN *helplessly shrugs his shoulders. A knock.*) (*Shaking his forefinger back and forwards.*) There is something wrong there. Come in. We will talk of this again.

SCENE V

FLEMMING. PRELL. FLACHSMANN. *Later* CHARLES JENSEN.

FLEMMING (*enters*). Mr. School Commissioner?

PRELL (*barking as before, but kindly*). Take a seat. (FLEMMING *seats himself on the last chair to the left.*) Mr. Flemming, you have committed a serious offence against discipline. A man of your intelligence will have recognised that this cannot be allowed to pass.

FLEMMING. Assuredly.

PRELL. You have certainly no want of intelligence. Your work in the class proves that. You are more than intelligent—you are even . . . (*breaking off*). Well, well. Your work in the class is good. Is very good. (*Looks for a moment straight before him and then jumps up.* FLEMMING *quietly rises and leans on the back of his chair.*) (*Runs up and down several times and then stands close to* FLEMMING.) Pre-eminently good. (*After some more steps.*) But that is in this case a matter of indifference. You have treated your superior as if he were an ass. That won't do.

We must nip that in the bud. No matter how brilliant your achievements may be—above everything I like your lesson in history. . . . You are fond of teaching history?

FLEMMING. Not specially.

PRELL. Why not?

FLEMMING. My notion of history is much the same as Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's.

PRELL. Ah. We must have a talk about that one day. But you have a perfect mastery of the subject. You have read Lamprecht?

FLEMMING. Certainly.

PRELL. And Ranke, of course?

FLEMMING. Certainly.

PRELL. And Droysen?

FLEMMING. Certainly.

PRELL. Häusser?

FLEMMING. Him also.

PRELL. Janssen, too?

FLEMMING. Certainly.

PRELL (*smiling*). I have noted it all. And you convey the matter to the children with the ease of an . . . artist. It is as if you saw right into the children's heads. You have observed how ideas and conceptions grow. (*To* FLACHSMANN.) That is something grand. That makes the schoolmaster.

FLACHS. (*assenting in a helpless way*). Certainly, certainly.

PRELL (*again close to* FLEMMING). What side do you take in the question between Natorp and Herbart?

FLEMMING. In the main with Natorp.

PRELL. And I. Most decidedly. The "Analysis of the content of consciousness" . . . of that you have a masterly comprehension. And the synthesis no less. (*To* FLACHSMANN.) That is something wonderful.

FLACHS. Certainly, certainly.

PRELL. Nothing I have ever . . . (*Suddenly breaking off, losing his temper at his own enthusiasm, with a fierce glare at* FLEMMING, *all at once becoming loud and sharp.*) Well, well. For all that, insubordination is insubordination still. And insubordination I will not have. You called your superior—what's this you called him? Botcher? Scholastic botcher?

FLEMMING. A paltry scholastic botcher.

PRELL. Yes, yes, that will not do. That we cannot tolerate under any circumstances. There is no . . . I cannot save you from the consequences. (*A knock.*) Come in. (CHARLES, *ten-year-old boy enters.*) (*Lays a hand on his shoulder.*) What do you want, my boy?

CHARLES. I was to give Mr. Vogelsang's compliments to Mr. Flachsmann, and the Grand Lama has gone to the Girls' School.

PRELL (*taken aback for a moment*). Grand Lama? Ah, yes. Well, then, just say to Mr. Vogelsang, "The School Commissioner sends his compliments and there is a mistake; the Grand Lama is here still." Do you understand?

CHARLES. Yes, sir. [*Exit.*

PRELL (*after taking a few steps*). As I have said, I cannot divert the consequences. But I can mitigate them. I will report your good work, your . . . (*growling*) well, well—your good work. You will ask Mr. Flachsmann's pardon, and then you will escape the worst and come off with a sharp reprimand.

FLEMMING (*composedly*). To ask Mr. Flachsmann's pardon, that *were* the worst.

PRELL. What . . . what's the meaning of that?

FLEMMING. Of a Flachsmann I will never ask pardon.

PRELL. What . . . why not?

FLEMMING. Because it would be monstrous.

PRELL (*stares at him long and closely and then says to* FLACHSMANN). Leave us alone.

FLACHS. Certainly, Mr. School Commissioner. (*With uneasy sanctimoniousness.*) Mr. School Commissioner, I am willing to forego. . . . I will not stand in the way of a reconciliation . . . if it rests with me.

PRELL. It does not rest with you.

FLACHS. (*retreating*). Very well, Mr. School Commissioner. [*Exit.*

SCENE VI

FLEMMING. PRELL.

PRELL (*sits down again*). Just sit down here. (FLEMMING *sits down.*) I do not speak to you now as an official. I speak as a friend. Of course I cannot tell you what my opinion of Mr. Flachsmann may be, and there is no reason why I should.

FLEMMING. No. And I assure you of my most complete discretion.

PRELL (*guffaws to himself*). Of course you will not have to work any longer under Mr. Flachsmann. I will transfer you to another school. After that the whole apology is nothing more than a formality.

FLEMMING (*cordially*). Forgive me, Mr. School Commissioner, I am indeed heartily thankful for your kindness, but this is just as if the executioner were to say, "Be quiet till I take off your head; it is a mere formality."

PRELL. That's nonsense. This is no execution. To me you remain just the same.

FLEMMING (*gently*). But not to me, School Commissioner. I would not take a bite of bread from myself after.

PRELL. This is ridiculous. You want to ruin yourself. It is lunacy for a man like you to leave the school. I should like to keep you for the school. (*Again looks fixedly before him a moment, then springs up and runs up and down the room.* FLEMMING *also rises and leans on his chair.* PRELL *remains beside him, without looking at him.*) The literature lesson was particularly good. Superb. Just superb. I never thought a real lyric could be brought home to a child. I see it can be done. You did not tear or hack the poem. You first carefully prepared the mind and mood; you got the soil ready for the poem, within the children; and then you raised (*with corresponding gesture*) the whole living plant, rootlets and all, and planted it straight in the children's hearts. Not first in their heads. That was a solemn moment. There was the true consecration of Art. Did you watch their eyes?

FLEMMING (*gleefully nodding assent*). Yes, yes.

PRELL. You could hear their hearts throb. I must confess to you mine throbbed too. I too was your scholar. I too was a little boy. I have cadged a lesson, little as you knew it. When you stopped all the children gave (*with a sigh of relaxed excitement*) a ha! I gave one too.

FLEMMING. Mr. School Commissioner, you make me very happy. (*Their hands involuntarily clasp.*)

PRELL. Well, is it not pure madness if for the sake of a trifle you throw over the school and start a cigar shop as best you can?

FLEMMING (*in distress*). Mr. School Commissioner, . . . I should be so glad to make myself understood by you. This Flachsmann is to me the most repulsive man I know. I felt that from the first day I saw him. I have a physical repulsion for him. Such, I imagine, are the feelings of a woman who has to yield herself to a man she loathes. . . . It is a question of chastity, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL (*looks at him a moment, then in a tone of decision*). Well, well. If you really cannot do it. I will make an exhaustive report as to the position of things here, and I will do my utmost to have you relieved from the apology and that the matter may end with a reprimand. But this much I tell you beforehand: it will be a wigging like none you have ever known. You may make up your mind for that.

FLEMMING. Mr. School Commissioner, I will refuse to receive this reprimand and return it to the Board.

PRELL (*a moment speechless, then very loud*). Then, sir, the deuce take you. Then out you'll run till your shoes fall off.

FLEMMING. I wear boots, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL (*still louder*). You are an insolent puppy!

FLEMMING. May I contest that?

PRELL (*beside himself and yelling*). No, sir, no; you may not. (*Races up and down several times, his hands behind his back, darting glances at* FLEMMING

with flashing eyes; at length he stops at the table. Still loud and angry.) What have you to say?

FLEMMING (*very modest and grave*). There are, it is true, insolent schoolmasters, Mr. School Commissioner, and there are submissive schoolmasters; of both more than enough; I am striving to increase, by one, the number of the self-respecting schoolmasters.

PRELL. And you will break your neck over it.

FLEMMING. Very possible. People see in us nothing more than artisans, often only mechanics, sometimes only machinery. The ambition to become artists must be awakened in us, artists who discover and annex to our Fatherland fresh dominions of the spirit. Mr. School Commissioner, for thirty years this school has been controlled by a cobbler. . . .

PRELL. Mr. Flemming, I cannot listen to this.

FLEMMING. Pardon me. Put it this way: this school has been ruled by a man who stretched every child on the same last, who laid them on his knee and hammered into their heads the regulation number of nails . . . that makes, at any rate, a material on which other people can plant their feet. Thirty years long has this Flachsmann sat here at this table and pressed the knob or rung the bell. By pressing a knob you can set a whole arsenal of machines in motion; but children and teachers and schools are organisms, and with organisms knob-pressing is worth simply nothing. Thirty years long has this man decided the weal or woe of

children and teachers; for over him a Head Knob-presser held sway. Ha! ha! people have a fine saying: "The master's eye makes the horse fat." People understand the stable better than the school-room; for horses are worth money. For thirty years, Mr. School Commissioner, you seem to be the first man who has come here with the feeling hand and the seeing eye of a gardener.

PRELL. Mr. Flemming, if I am not quite mistaken, you are now administering a reprimand to the Board.

FLEMMING. That is not my office.

PRELL. All the same you are a very good hand at it. But you make one prodigious mistake. You judge all teachers by yourself. But laws are made for all and exist for all. We cannot allow to one official what we cannot allow to all. And we cannot allow all officials to call their superiors "paltry scholastic cobblers." Not just yet. We must come to an end. I ask you for the last time, Will you accept the reprimand, be it what it may?

FLEMMING. No, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL (*conclusively, comparatively calm*). Then you are sacked. (*Somewhat louder.*) Then you are slaughtered. (*Still somewhat louder.*) Then you are exterminated. You may go. Send Flachsmann to me.

FLEMMING. Certainly, Mr. School Commissioner.

[*Exit.*

SCENE VII

PRELL. FLACHSMANN.

PRELL *goes up and down excitedly, stops before the placard "School Regulations," shakes his head, and then continues his perambulations. A knock.* PRELL *hears, but says nothing in reply.*

FLACHS. (*opens the door cautiously and slowly shuffles in. A pause*). I almost fear that the kindness of the School Commissioner has, so far as Mr. Flemming is concerned . . .

PRELL (*without regarding what he says, very gruffly*). You are costing the State dear, my dear sir. (FLACHSMANN *remains silent and confused.*) You cost the State one of its best teachers. If not the very best.

FLACHS. Mr. School Commissioner, it is not my fault. I am at any time ready to hold out the hand of reconciliation; I have nothing at all against Mr. Flemming. . . .

PRELL (*as before*). Why do you hate the man?

FLACHS. I? hate? Mr. School Commissioner, I hate no man. On the contrary, I have . . .

PRELL (*as before*). That is the hatred of the creeper for the flier. The hatred of the hustler for the born conqueror.

FLACHS. Mr. School Commissioner, I admit, and heartily, that Mr. Flemming is a highly gifted man, and if he . . .

PRELL (*stops before the placard "School Regulations," and bangs it contemptuously*). What kind of ridiculous trash is this? School regulations of 123 paragraphs. That's the code of a convict prison. The day is too short to carry them out. With coddling of that kind you rob people of the power of seeing the essentials, the power of feeling what is great.

FLACHS. (*trying a wheedling tone*). Mr. School Commissioner, I have always been a great friend of discipline; if in the school the strictest discipline does not . . .

PRELL. You never dreamed what sort of a man you had to deal with. You have pettifogged the man. You ought to be very glad that he did no harm to you. If you had left the man quietly at his work, you could have got on with him, because he has the more sense. (*Close to* FLACHSMANN, *tapping his coat with his forefinger.*) With such people a man in your place should content himself with a show of authority. People of this kind are made Prime Ministers and the sceptre is tacitly left in their hands, or else they will get hold of the civil list as well.

FLACHS. (*with craven malignity*). I am surprised

to hear the School Commissioner speak so. The School Commissioner was always before in favour of the Monarchy.

PRELL (*close to his face*). But not the limited!

FLACHS. But Mr. Flemming has constantly undermined my authority. Since Mr. Flemming has been here, the discipline of the staff has . . .

PRELL (*very brusquely*). Fiddle-faddle. I know only one kind of discipline: the discipline of the man who knows. The man who knows something has discipline. The man who knows nothing goes in for tyranny. That is always the way.

FLACHS. (*defiantly*). If I know nothing, the Government should not have appointed me.

PRELL. My dear sir, that is the first sensible word you have said. You are as well suited for teaching a school as a sheep is for thought-reading. (*Clapping his hands and locking them together.*) What a lesson you gave to-day! It was incredible. The children's answers were often to the full more sensible than your questions. Your questions were nothing but Irish bulls. You asked the children, "What does marriage lay for the family?" and the answer you wanted was "The foundation!" Yes, now I ask a man! (*Again walks up and down. Then again stops beside* FLACHSMANN.) Where exactly have you been examined?

FLACHS. In Weissenfels.

PRELL. In Weissenfels? When?

FLACHS. 1869.

PRELL. 1869? Then you have been examined as an extern.

FLACHS. (*taken aback a moment*). Yes . . . yes.

PRELL. As a matter of fact, I visited the Weissenfels College and held the examination of '69.

FLACHS. (*uneasily*). Yes! Do you say so? . . . Mr. School Commissioner, the lesson is almost over. . . . I . . . I like to be there when the children go to the playground.

PRELL. That is not so very important. I do not recollect having seen you then or heard your name.

FLACHS. I had been ill, Mr. School Commissioner, and was examined later by myself.

PRELL. Indeed. Did you not attend any College?

FLACHS. Oh yes, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Which?

FLACHS. Esslingen.

PRELL. Why, then, were you not examined in Esslingen?

FLACHS. I was examined; but unfortunately I did not pass.

PRELL. Why not?

FLACHS. The Professor of Method disliked me. He would never have let me through.

PRELL. If you really knew anything he was bound to let you through. It was rather the Method which disliked you. And so you passed in Weissenfels? I don't understand that. How, then, did you ever come from Esslingen to Weissenfels?

FLACHS. I got a place in a preparatory school in

the neighbourhood of Weissenfels, and so I was examined in Weissenfels.

PRELL. Hm. That is a puzzle to me. They had a very high standard at that time in Weissenfels. They required a pretty good deal. Christian, for instance, required an extraordinary amount in history. And what a history lesson you give! The things you told the children weren't history at all. . . . What class did you take then?

FLACHS. Second class with high distinction.

PRELL (*very emphatically*). That is impossible.

FLACHS. But yet it is. . . .

PRELL. That must be a slip of the pen. You must have been . . . no, that is out of the question. Had you a severe illness?

FLACHS. Illness? (*Grasping the meaning.*) Yes . . . certainly. (*A bell.* FLACHSMANN *as if released.*) There is the bell, Mr. School Commissioner. (*Going.*)

PRELL. I hear. . . . Wait. (*Looking him fixedly in the face.*) The longer I stay, the more riddles you set me, Mr. Flachsmann. What was it you said a moment ago: you had always insisted on the strictest discipline? Did you insist on it in the case of Diercks?

FLACHS. Mr. School Commissioner, in the case of Diercks I have erred; so much I must unfortunately admit. But I have done it for the sake of an old friend. Diercks' father was in fact an old friend of mine; we came from the same village, and, as children, played together. . . .

PRELL. Indeed.

FLACHS. Yes . . . our parents lived next door to one another. . . . Yes . . . and, Mr. School Commissioner! For the sake of my old friend . . . I would once more beg Mr. School Commissioner whether Mr. School Commissioner might not give Diercks one more trial. (*Taking a sentimental flight.*) When a man is once flung on the street, he falls lower and lower . . .

PRELL. Mr. . . .

FLACHS. Indeed, he will never do anything of the kind again. . . .

PRELL (*sternly*). Mr. Flachsmann, you are pleading for a man who trained his pupils in fraud. You all at once exhibit a marvellous placability towards a man on whom you reported to us with the pettiness of a venomous hatred. I hope that you will not compel me to give expression to a suspicion. Once I have uttered a suspicion, I follow it up.

FLACHS. Oh, oh, Mr. School Commissioner, I . . . I do not understand at all what Mr. School Commissioner . . .

PRELL. So much the better for you. (*A knock.*) Come in.

SCENE VIII

As before. Enter one after the other : BETTY STURHAHN, GISA, VOGELSANG, RÖMER, WEIDENBAUM, RIEMANN, *and* FLEMMING. *After them* NEGENDANK.

WEIDEN. (*in conversation with* RÖMER *as he enters*). No, it is quite right. That is the man for me : just and resolute. When a man does his duty . . . (*They signal him to be silent, while they point his attention to the presence of the* COMMISSIONER.)

PRELL (*seated in* FLACHSMANN'S *chair*). Pray be seated.

The Staff seat themselves in a semicircle in the following order :—

Sturhahn, Weidenbaum, Prell, Flachsmann, Riemann,
Römer, Vogelsang,
Flemming, Gisa.

PRELL. Ladies and gentlemen, I have had to make an example in this school. Mr. Diercks, in order to hide his delinquencies, has not only been

guilty of fraud himself, but has made accomplices of his pupils. That is the most detestable thing which any teacher can do. Mr. Diercks has in letter after letter begged me to cancel his dismissal. I have no notion of doing so. Towards such offences I know no mercy. But with equal frankness I recognise what is good, and I thank the most of you for showing me much that is good. The greater part of what I had to say I have already said to you individually; I have but little to add. (*A short pause.*) Mr. Römer . . . (RÖMER *bends forward.*) The combat with ignorance is one protracted siege. You cannot carry it by sheer assault. I am glad that you have fire and passion within (*pointing to his breast*); but lock it firm within; thus it will swell up with all the greater power. Do not let all pass up the chimney, or in three years your oven will be cold.

RÖMER. Quite so.

PRELL. You also talk too loud. At your age people want to blow away stupidity by force of lung. I can assure you that cannot be done. Otherwise I am very well pleased. I thank you.

RÖMER (*smiling happily*). Thanks.

PRELL. Miss Sturhahn, you also talk too loud.

BETTY. If I don't, the squad will not hear.

PRELL (*softly*). The squad hears the better the lower the squad-leader speaks. But I could understand almost every word when you were teaching.

BETTY. I had to shout louder than you did. You were talking so loud.

PRELL. You are open to my criticism, but I am not open happily to yours. For the rest, I have seen well enough that you have the best intentions towards the children and work with the most straightforward zeal. I thank you.

BETTY (*grumblingly*). Thanks.

PRELL (*to the others, in snappish tone*). You must not go snapping about at the children. Our scholars often have no sunshine in their homes; therefore they must have it in their school. It is so nice for a teacher to have some sense of humour. Humour is moisture; and nothing is more essential for the atmosphere of the school. Humour is possessed (*parenthetically, grumpily*), apart from Mr. Flemming, by Mr. Vogelsang especially. Above all in his messages to Mr. Flachsmann. I would, however, put them in writing, Mr. Grand Lama Vogelsang. The children need not be told who I am.

VOGEL. (*smiling*). No!

PRELL. However, all your humour is not at the expense of your chiefs. It was a pleasure to me to listen to you; you are a blithe lure-bird of learning, Mr. Vogelsang. (VOGELSANG *smilingly bows.*) But that it is possible for a class to have too good a time you have demonstrated, Miss Holm. Pray, Miss Holm, who exactly has the most voice in your class?

GISA (*with coy archness*). I believe I have, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Do you say so? What I saw was

jovial anarchy. One can hardly believe that sixty little boys can do what they like with you.

GISA. But what am I to do with them? Beat them I cannot.

PRELL. Well . . . I am only afraid that you will come to grief sooner or later.

GISA (*blissfully positive*). Ah no, the little rogues are much too fond of me.

PRELL. Indeed. Well, I daresay if Mr. Flemming will carry you off you will have the good wishes of the school.

GISA (*fervently*). Thank you, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Mr. Riemann, since you left the College have you ever had a book in your hand?

RIEMANN. Aye, indeed.

PRELL. Which?

RIEMANN. Ooh, the . . . I am not right sure what it was called.

PRELL. They say that you are fond of handling the book of thirty-two leaves.

RIEMANN. Thirty-two leaves?

PRELL. You would surely like to have a little more time to play Skat?

RIEMANN (*unsuspectingly*). More time? Oh, no.

PRELL (*growing gradually more and more acid*). Only say the word. We will give you more time for Skat than you will like. We will retire you. We have no use for out-of-date teachers. A teacher who is not up to date is like a doctor who is not up to date; eventually he commits homicide. For

homicides we have no esteem. When I come back, you shall give me an account of the latest position of the science of Method, do you understand?

RIEMANN. Yes, Mr. School Commissioner. (*A pause.*)

PRELL (*strangely softly*). In your class, Mr. Weidenbaum, I have admired the precision with which the scholars strike the tables. How have you achieved that?

WEIDEN. (*stands up with the zeal of one who is complimented*). By constant practice, Mr. School Commissioner. At first I got it done by numbers: in sixes. (*While he slowly imitates the movements.*) At *One*, the children lay the hands flat on the table; at *Two*, they grasp the flap; at *Three*, they raise it precisely to the perpendicular; at *Four*, they replace it without a sound; at *Five*, they let go; and, at *Six*, they fold hands. If it is practised a couple of times for half an hour, it goes all right.

PRELL. Do you say so?

WEIDEN. Yes. I have done it first in fours; but, on the expert advice of Mr. Flachsmann, I do it now in sixes.

PRELL. Is that so? Yes, Mr. Flachsmann has drawn my attention to the merits of your class. I have also admired the way in which your scholars when they show hands never hold the finger higher than their heads. How have you managed that?

WEIDEN. (*with great self-importance, feeling himself the centre of attraction*). If a boy raises his finger higher than his head, he has to write out one

hundred times, "I must not raise my finger higher than my head." That is always my practice: if a scholar looks about or laughs or anything of that kind, he must write out one hundred times, "I must not look about me" or "I must not laugh in class"; and if he does not do it properly, he must write it out another hundred times.

PRELL. Indeed. (*Still quite graciously to all appearance.*) Are you aware that you are a slave-driver? (WEIDENBAUM *sinks in his chair.*) (*Gradually rising to a climax.*) Are you aware that you are worse than the most arrant bircher? Are you aware that your class is a wax-figure show? . . . Are you aware that your scholars are nothing but corpses? If I were to step in front of your class and say: "The sofa is a mammal; for it brings its young into the world alive," every one of your scholars in turn would repeat it after me. Not a dissenting voice. I wager that at a given sign I could make your scholars all say "Bow-wow."

WEIDEN. Mr. School Commissioner, I always do my duty . . .

PRELL. Duty? Duty? Duty is what you pay the postman on a registered letter. From the teacher I ask enthusiasm. You will think to yourself: What an idiot this fellow is, asking me for enthusiasm! Work, Mr. Weidenbaum; then the enthusiasm will come. Clasp the world tight and you will come to love it. All you do is routine. Routine is another name for laziness.

WEIDEN. Mr. School Commissioner, I have always performed whatever . . .

(PRELL *jumps up and begins again to perambulate. The others rise.*)

PRELL. Sir, I ask force. I ask life, sir. When your scholars go forth into the world, they halt like cows before a strange gate. I want *men* who will unlatch the door. Look at Mr. Flemming. He awakes force, begets force; you exhaust it. Look at one of Mr. Flemming's arithmetic lessons. There everything lives and thrives. The numbers and the children! Old as I am, I have thought: Wert thou again fourteen years old and couldst here sit and have thy share . . . (*in altered tone.*) Alas, Mr. Flemming will not submit to the necessary discipline. Therefore he must take the consequence. It grieves me that in Flemming's case I must most emphatically repeat . . . (*A knock.*) Come in.

ROBERT PFEIFFER. (*enters*). A letter for Mr. School Commissioner. (*Gives the letter and exit.*)

PRELL (*takes and reads. When he has read, he stares at* FLACHSMANN. *Then with every sign of suppressed excitement and bewilderment*). Ladies and gentlemen, it is . . . I will . . . for the present return to your classes.

VOGEL. Mr. School Commissioner, may I crave a word?

PRELL (*distractedly*). What do you want? (*From time to time staring at* FLACHSMANN. FLACHSMANN *fixes his eyes mechanically on the letter.*)

VOGEL. I should like to ask our colleague Flemming in your presence and in the presence of the Staff whether it is true that he has described our whole staff as dead and rotten, and himself as the only one that is alive?

FLEMMING (*looking hard at him, gravely*). Vogelsang! Old donkey! Do you believe such a thing?

VOGEL. (*returning his look and then reaching out his hand to him*). Since you can still say "Donkey" in your old way, I believe it no longer . . . Then, Mr. School Commissioner, we will petition the Board to have Mr. Flemming left in his place, and I am convinced that the entire Staff will sign it.

(WEIDENBAUM *promptly slinks off.*)

RÖMER. Certainly, the Staff votes solid for Mr. Flemming.

PRELL (*raises a comically warning finger to* RÖMER). We will talk of this again, gentlemen. Now go to your classes.

(VOGELSANG, RIEMANN, RÖMER, GISA, BETTY *bow and retire.*)

SCENE IX

PRELL. FLACHSMANN.

PRELL. Mr. Flachsmann, what is your Christian name?

FLACHS. (*faltering*). I? I am called George Henry.

PRELL (*looking him straight in the face*). That is a mistake. Your name is John Henry.

FLACHS. (*sinks on a chair, helplessly*). No . . . I . . .

PRELL. This letter, I may tell you, is from your friend Diercks.

FLACHS. (*exploding, with clenched fists*). The blackguard! The common, damned blackguard!

PRELL. The young man who, owing to illness, was re-examined at Weissenfels in 1869 and passed his examination as extern candidate was called George Henry and was your younger brother. He died, shortly after the examination, of consumption and you took possession of his papers.

FLACHS. The blackguard! the scoundrel!

PRELL. Such is the friendship of the wicked, Mr. Flachsmann. It is "as the shadow in the

morning; hour by hour it steals away." The Latin is still blunter, it says: "a noble pair of brothers." How, then, does Diercks know all this?

FLACHS. His father was clerk to the School-Board.

PRELL. Ah, and he knew you from the time you were at home! That is the "dear old friend!" (FLACHSMANN *remains silent.*) Hem. The circumstances were certainly very opportune for swindling, because the examiners were the only witnesses of that examination. And so, when it went well for long years and still went well, at last it went too well for you, and you took to dancing on the ice. (FLACHSMANN *remains silent.*) Luckily that is always the way. When God gives such people a place, He takes from them the wit to keep it. So you wanted to ruin an excellent man. You can hardly expect any mercy.

FLACHS. (*affecting the contrite*). I will at once apply for my pension.

PRELL (*stares at him*). You ask for a pension after all this? Are you demented or . . . ?

FLACHS. Mr. School Commissioner, the . . . Diercks will hold his tongue, he must now hold his tongue; I will take care of that. . . .

PRELL. Aha! The Board will make a confederate of this worthy gentleman, that's what you mean.

FLACHS. Mr. School Commissioner . . . the Board . . . can quash the inquiry.

PRELL (*very curt*). We will quash you. As you

got your place by fraud, you have never been appointed at all. Consequently the charge against Mr. Flemming falls to the ground. And consequently you have no business here. (*Pointing to the door.*) Instantly leave the school-house.

FLACHS. I . . . I have first to pack up my things . . . my things . . . I have my things here . . .

PRELL. They will be sent after you. We will not keep any of them.

FLACHS. Yes, but I have still . . .

PRELL. I won't bear the sight of you. (FLACHSMANN *slips out as quick as lightning.* PRELL *presses the knob beside the door.*)

SCENE X

PRELL. NEGENDANK. *Then* FLEMMING.

(NEGENDANK *enters.*)

PRELL. Ask Mr. Flemming to come here. (*Walks up and down, his hands behind his back, and then stands beside the table. Again takes up the letter and reads it.*) (FLEMMING *enters.*) I have just sent Flachsmann to the deuce. He had no teaching qualifications whatever. He had obtained his office fraudulently, by means of his brother's certificate.

FLEMMING. Is it possible? Truly, to the blessed red-tape nothing is impossible. (*Sinks on a chair.*)

PRELL (*tartly*). That is nonsense. There will always be rogues.

FLEMMING. No doubt. But if this gentleman had happened to possess a regular certificate, I was done for. And yet the fraud with the certificate was perhaps his least. Everything the man did was fraudulent, even when he did not intend it. No one asked him for guidance or stimulus, to be a creator or an artist; for thirty long years he had

merely to be a good foreman and to set his lessons. *That* he could undertake. He kept the machinery in working order. If, Mr. School Commissioner, you will reflect a moment, you will find an amazing number of Flachsmanns; alas, they have not all fraudulent certificates. You will find that the Flachsmanns and the Weidenbaums flourish in vile profusion, that they are degrading the German school to a drill-hall and a riding-school, and are stifling every fair young impulse with sneaking malice.

PRELL. Really we ought to be glad that the worthy Flachsmann has given us so little trouble in sweeping him out. Things do not always go so smoothly.

FLEMMING. Only one must not be deceived because the certificate is all in order.

PRELL. Your will is law to me, Mr. Head Master.

FLEMMING (*springs up*). "Head Master?"

PRELL (*brusquely*). Perhaps you protest against this title?

FLEMMING (*stammering*). No . . . I . . .

PRELL. I presume that you have passed the necessary examinations?

FLEMMING. Certainly . . . I . . .

PRELL. Then take charge of this school. Provisionally, for the present. I think it will not be long till you receive your appointment.

FLEMMING (*quivering*). Mr. School Commissioner . . . this is not possible.

PRELL (*to his face, imitating him with comical mockery*). "To the blessed red-tape nothing is impossible."

FLEMMING (*in intense excitement*). I am here . . . here . . . to mould, as I will . . . just as I will . . . all that is beautiful and new . . .

PRELL. If you don't make too much of a bedlam, yes.

FLEMMING. Mr. School Commissioner, I should like to hug you.

PRELL. For this part of the performance I will summon Miss Holm. (*Presses the knob on the table.*)

FLEMMING. Ah yes. Gisa!

PRELL. Ssh!

SCENE XI

As before. NEGENDANK.

(NEGENDANK *enters.*)

PRELL (*with suppressed fun*). Mr. Negendank, Mr. Flachsmann is no longer in charge of this school; Mr. Flemming has taken his place. Permit me to introduce to you your new Chief.

NEGEN. Mr. School Commissioner, I must say I approve of this step. I am convinced that we shall get on well with him. (*Stretching out his hand.*) I congratulate you. (FLEMMING *makes a ceremonious bow.* PRELL *turns quickly aside, to conceal his amusement.*) (*With imperturbable seriousness.*) What a thing, to be sure! Now we have kicked out two of our people; and one of our classes has nobody to teach it.

PRELL. Well, what do "we" do in such cases, Mr. Negendank?

NEGEN. Well . . . if it comes to that, I can teach a class for that long.

PRELL. Can you do that, then, Mr. Negendank?

NEGEN. (*with a highly superior air*). Oh, yes. I was a non-commissioned officer.

PRELL (*in a similar tone*). Do you say so? Oh, then . . .

NEGEN. I will be a Moltke to the children. I knew him personally.

PRELL. Quite right, Mr. Negendank. But, in the first instance, beg Miss Holm to be so kind as to come here.

NEGEN. At your service, Mr. School Commissioner. [*Exit.*

SCENE XII

FLEMMING. PRELL.

(PRELL *and* FLEMMING *burst, when* NEGENDANK *goes out, into smothered laughter.*)

FLEMMING. Poor Moltke!

PRELL. He is superb. However, there is one thing more: you must promise me not to suggest in any way to your *fiancée*, either by word or look or gesture, but on the contrary to back me up.

FLEMMING. What is it to be?

PRELL. I want to have a bit of fun.

FLEMMING. All right, I promise.

PRELL. Be quiet. She is coming. (*Seats himself at the table and assumes a highly official attitude.*)

SCENE XIII

As before. GISA.

GISA (*enters and regards the pair with questioning looks*). Mr. School Commissioner. . . . ?

PRELL (*brusquely*). Be seated. (GISA *seats herself.*) As to your teaching we have already spoken, Miss Holm. But you have still something else on your conscience. (GISA *looks round to* FLEMMING, *who likewise has assumed an attitude of stern gravity.*) Miss Holm, you must look at me. (GISA *turns again to the Commissioner with comical haste.*) It is in reference to the kissing incident. Do you remember the circumstance?

GISA. Oh, yes.

PRELL. The worst feature in it is that you have allowed yourself to be kissed by your superior.

GISA (*pointing at* FLEMMING). He is no superior. We are not yet married. (*A tender look at* FLEMMING.) And even then it is doubtful.

FLEMMING. My young lady, you will yet discover that I am in another sense your superior.

GISA. What does that mean, you saucy rogue?

FLEMMING. It means that Flachsmann is dismissed and I am now head of this school.

GISA (*jumping up several times*). Ja . . . Jack . . . (*Turning to* PRELL, *artlessly.*) Ah, no, it isn't true, is it? (PRELL *nods strenuously.*) GISA *flings herself with a cry of joy into* FLEMMING'S *arms.*) Jack! (*Long embrace and kiss.*)

PRELL (*jumps up, half in jest, half earnest*). Good heavens . . . will—will—will . . . will you now . . . ! My good people! If any one were to come! You put me in a nice position! (*Runs to the door and holds it closed. The school bell sounds.*) Have done, have done, my good people. (*He opens the door and speaks out.*) Ah, Mr. Weidenbaum, please have the Staff summoned.

WEIDEN. (*within*). All right, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL (*closes the door. To the pair*). Just stop. For we must look into matters again. You think no doubt that this is going on for ever—special conferences every day in the week. (*To* GISA.) From to-morrow you are to teach next door in the Girls' School, and one of the ladies there will come here in your place.

GISA. Oh, my goodness—girls? They are worse even than boys.

PRELL. Who told you that?

GISA. I know it myself.

PRELL. Well . . . if you wish it very much . . . I can transfer you to quite another province.

GISA. For Heaven's sake . . . my Jack . . . (*About to fling herself again on his neck.*)

PRELL (*extends his arm between them*). What? (*Voices are heard. To* GISA.) You will now place yourself there (*pointing to the left, then to* FLEMMING), and you come here to me. (*Places himself at the right of the table.* FLEMMING *stands beside the Head Master's seat. A knock.*) Come in.

SCENE XIV

As before. The school Staff.

PRELL (*when the Staff is assembled*). Ladies and gentlemen . . . Mr. Flachsmann has been discharged from his office. Why, you will learn hereafter. For the present the grounds do not concern us. Mr. Flemming undertakes the control of the school, in the first instance provisionally. (*Gives his hand to* FLEMMING.) Administer your office with vigour and enjoyment and . . . (*with his left hand describing a circle in the air*) give a jolly good airing to this fusty shanty.

FLEMMING. Thanks, Mr. School Commissioner. . . . My dear colleagues, I feel this sudden revolution not as promotion, but as emancipation. The emancipator stands here. (*Pointing to the School Commissioner.*) In the spirit of our School Commissioner will I administer my office; were I to do otherwise I should be a blackguard. That means that I will discriminate between a man's work and his demeanour; I will judge his work according to his motive force and vitalising power for the future,

and I will meet you, as I will meet our pupils, with cheerful trust in the individual and in his freedom.

VOGEL *and* RÖMER. Bravo!

(*The Staff congratulate* FLEMMING.)

PRELL. Then we will close the school for to-day and dismiss the children, so that they also may enjoy themselves. (*The Staff laughingly bow themselves out.* GISA *remains standing beside* FLEMMING. PRELL *replies with funny jerky bows, in keeping with his other gestures, and takes up his hat and his papers.*)

RÖMER (*as he goes out*). The Inspector is here.

SCENE XV

As before. BRÖSECKE.

BRÖS. Go-o-o-od-day, my respected friends, good-day, my respected School Commissioner. I have been on a little trip to my son-in-law; when the early pears are ripe, I must always be off there . . . ha-ha-ha-ha-ha . . . well, on my return, I heard that you were inspecting here; so I just wished to pay my respects to you.

PRELL. Hm.

BRÖS. Well, I suppose you found everything in perfect order?

PRELL. Oh, yes, in beautiful order.

BRÖS. Yes, yes, yes, I am sure of that; our Flachsmann is a jewel. But where is he?

PRELL. We have set the jewel.

BRÖS. Ha-ha-ha-ha . . . how so?

PRELL. We have advanced him a step.

BRÖS. Well, well—to Inspectorship?

PRELL. No, to the street door. (BRÖS. *stares at him with a face of indescribable bewilderment.*) Come with me to my cab, Mr. Inspector. I have still to explain some matters to you. Goodbye, Mr.

Flemming (*when the latter is about following him*). Stay here. (*Fiercely shaking his finger at* GISA.) But you come with me. The school is no dovecote.

GISA (*with arch deference*). After you, Mr. School Commissioner.

PRELL. Oh, no. The ladies always go first. Because then we can keep our eyes on them.

(GISA *goes out with a charmingly acted piece of pouts, and turns to the left.* PRELL *waves back another salute to* FLEMMING *and goes out with* BRÖSECKE, *and likewise turns to the left.*)

SCENE XVI

FLEMMING. GISA.

FLEMMING (*follows their departure as far as the door and remains a moment standing, sunk in thought. A knock at the door to the left.* FLEMMING *starts and turns his head in that direction*). Come in.

GISA (*steals in, stands at the door and points her finger in a childish way*). Mr. Head Master, I know something.

FLEMMING. What is it?

GISA. You are in love with me.

FLEMMING (*smiling*). You little rogue; if the Commissioner were to come back now!

GISA. Ha-ha-ha, he's gone, the school is clear. (*Pops over to the entrance, stands in the corridor, lays the hollow of her hand to her mouth and bawls*) Mr. Scho-o-o-ol Commiss-s-s-s-sioner, are you ther-r-re?

FLEMMING. Lassie, are you the very mischief?

GISA (*flinging herself on his neck*). Yes, I am thine, thou mischief. (*Yielding to an access of deep feeling.*) While I live, I must come to thee; thou

hast my soul. (*Reclining on his arm and offering him her mouth.*) Give me back my soul. (FLEMMING *kisses her.*) Take it back again. (FLEMMING *kisses her again.*) (*Blissfully, looking up at him.*) How nice you are, you wretch!

FLEMMING. Do you know what I find so delicious in you?

GISA. Well?

FLEMMING. That you are no schoolmistress. Remember, when I come home from the school and want still to be playing the schoolmaster, you must grab me by the shoulders and shake me and say, "You, Schoolmaster! Be human."

GISA. Yes. Every day?

FLEMMING. Every day. This I firmly believe: the highest point of our art can be attained only while we remain human. (*Regarding her and stroking her hair.*) "The highest of our art"—Good heavens! When I see such a creature as thou art, so blithe, so cordial, then I feel that I can never give humanity of my best . . . not with all the power of art.

GISA. What does this mean? Your eyes are wet! To-day you should be happy.

FLEMMING. My love—good luck with dry eyes! —that must indeed be a tiny piece of luck.

GISA (*gazes long at him with full, serious eye. Then slowly bends over his hands and kisses them. Suddenly she turns her head listeningly. Gleefully*). Jack! Do you hear?

FLEMMING. What, my love?

GISA. Do you not hear? The lassies are singing again. (*She flies to the window and flings it open.*)

SONG OF THE GIRLS.

Joy is dancing,
Joy is sparkling
All around;
Dancing on the emerald hillside,
Sparkling on the river's still tide;
Joy is dancing,
Joy is sparkling
All around.

GISA (*at the window*). Six-eight time, Jack! (*Softly, trembling with suppressed excitement.*) Jack —dance! (*Then with a loud burst of childlike exultation.*) Jack—dance!

FLEMMING (*spreading out his arms*). Come.

(GISA *dances towards him and whirls him away. While the girls' song continues, the Curtain falls.*)

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